

Jenny the Joyous



Cornelia Stratton Parker



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Jenny the Joyous

by Cornelia Stratton Parker

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PART I

JENNY THE JOYOUS

CHAPTER I

THERE are many wise grown folks who are sure they can look back upon their early years and remember just how they felt about the sun, moon, and stars, God, angels, and the devil, their parents and their friends, at the age of four. Perhaps they can.

Some other folks are never given to looking back over their extreme youth at all, except vaguely to recall a party where somebody spilled the ice cream, or how their mother cried when their little sister died, or when Uncle Alec came back from China and brought a canary bird, or the time they had the mumps and it snowed so hard.

Jenny was not one to do much looking backwards. Not that she deliberately said she would not because she lacked sympathy with the idea. It was simply a matter of time. When she was awake she was always too busy thinking about or doing something else. Anyhow her memory was poor. Average, but poor.

She would not then have been in the least sure of what she felt about anything or anybody in those early years. She was very sure of the present,—that the world was made to her own special order. She was comparatively sure of the future,—that it would continue more or less

as the present; that she, Jenny Joslin, would next year and year after next find herself fairly swamped with the good things of life, forced for the very pain of so much happiness to ease her grateful heart as best she could. Which was after the manner of her own invention. When her happiness became really extreme, when her spirits became exuberant past the point of maidenly control—Jenny being short on maidenly control at best—she laughed to herself, raised her eyes, blew a kiss to heaven, and called up, “Thank You, God!” No sense to it, in one way. Not for a moment did she think there was any God sitting up on high waiting to be thanked. She would not have blown a real orthodox Michael Angelo God a kiss. Yet she felt uncomfortable until she expressed gratitude to somebody. It eased her heart, done so.

A world made to order from the very start,—that is, her very start, except in the mere detail of a father. Her mother was exactly after Jenny’s own pattern for mothers. It was difficult to see where she could have been improved upon. But her father . . . Whoever patterned him, Jenny was wont to think in her young years, could have done no boasting about the job. Nor did there seem any excuse for him anyway, as far as she could see. Everything appeared to go more smoothly when he was not on hand.

A great deal of uselessness there seemed to be about men, any way ’round. Especially to men as fathers and husbands. Especially queer things, husbands. Yet everybody seemed to have them. All up and down the block they came in pairs. If any house on the entire street should start to burn down, out would run a husband and wife,—

that is, if it were night time and the man home where the general public seemed to think he belonged. Nineteen cases out of twenty they would be followed by one or more children. But why that inevitable man?

So much for Jenny and the adult male sex at the age of eight.

And yet at the age of eight Jenny realized there had to be street-car conductors and grocery-wagon drivers and doctors and piano tuners. And once she saw a man go up in a balloon and drop in a parachute. He made a distinct contribution to the world. He was useful. In addition there was Uncle Alec.

But if the conductor and the grocer and the doctor and the piano tuner and the balloon man and even Uncle Alec lived right in the house day after day with one and one's mother,—were there behind a paper at breakfast; were back at irregular times for lunch, and expected the food to be hot; appeared every evening for dinner and took up all the conversation—if there were any conversation at all—with one's mother so that one was scolded at if one tried so much as to ask a very important question; and then after dinner read a book, or made one's mother read out loud; or, worst of all, took one's mother out of the house bodily, often after one's mother had whispered in the afternoon that she hoped father wouldn't want to go out that evening, she was so *very* tired . . . No, men should learn to keep their places, which were plenty numerous enough for them, without ever mixing up in people's home life.

If around the age of eight Jenny saw no use at all for

men, either in theory or in practice, she saw a great deal of use for boys. For boys, and grasshoppers.

Was there anything which could inspire more gratitude for just being alive than a warm June day, a bamboo pole with a string tied to it and a hook at the end, and an empty baking-powder can with holes punched through the top?

"Jenny, where are you going?"

"To catch grasshoppers."

She knew just the sun-baked field of dry grass where the grasshoppers hopped in all directions at each slow bare-legged step she made. The amazing delight of creeping up on a victim, pouncing down on him with a brown hand, lifting up each finger separately, then slowly her palm, and finding she had trapped two luscious morsels! Down in the baking-powder can they went, to hop energetically and noisily against its tin sides. What a feel of prosperity,—two grasshoppers! And then another and another and another. . . . Who noticed the heat, the prickles? A step, a stealthy creep ahead, a pounce, a peering under a sunburnt hand, a gleeful and uproarious chuckle, a triumphant conversation with the captive until he was safe in the baking powder can. . . . Who could improve upon the world?

"What ya doin'?"

"Me? I'm catching grasshoppers."

"What for?"

"What *for*? Well, now I never! What *for*? Why—to catch fish with, of course."

"Why don't you use worms?"

"'Cause they're nothing like so much fun to catch. You have to look in the damp shady places to find worms, and then they can't get away from you fast enough to make it any fun. I like the sun and grasshoppers ever so much better."

"That your pole?"

"Don't call it a *pole*. My Uncle Alec says any one who knows calls what you fish with a *rod*. Of course mine is only a pole, but when I'm ten my Uncle Alec is going to give me a rod, a real one, the kind you can take apart. So I'm starting to call this a rod so I won't make any mistakes when I do get a real one. It's better to call a pole a rod than ever to call a rod a pole. That would be *awful*."

The ragged small boy merely sniffed voluminously. Philosophy was out of his line.

"When ya goin' fishin'?"

"Now."

"Fish won't bite when it's so hot."

"But sometimes they do, for me. Uncle Alec can't catch them then. He's in too much of a hurry. He misses half the fun. He just uses a fly. There's no fun to a fly. Then he throws it 'way off from him, where he can't see hardly anything."

"What do you do?"

"I snoop around till I see a hole I like where the water's quiet enough so you can watch things. Then I crawl up to it on my stomach. Then I drop the hook right down under my nose where I can see everything that's going on, 'cause my face is right above the water. At first I scare

everything away. After a long time everything in that hole forgets about me. All kinds of things get to wiggling and crawling and swimming about. At last even the trout who owns that pool comes around and smells my grasshopper. I think it's lots more fun to watch a trout just smell a grasshopper than it is to catch a fish 'way off from you where you can't see anything but a *pull*. My heart beats something awful. Sometimes I catch him anyhow, 'cause he just gets nervous and bothered seeing that grasshopper under his nose forever. He snaps at it to get it out of his way. Then I pull him up, and, oh, my goodness, I sing and dance, and, my goodness, I can't wait to get home and show Uncle Alec. He doesn't see *how* I catch anything. That's because he won't wait around long enough. And all the time the flowers along the bank smell so good, and the skaters skate all over the water, and the birds hop right near me. I don't mind it if an ant crawls up my leg. I kick him off, and the fish doesn't see. But I sure do just *hate* it when a fly gets on my nose. If you just wiggle your nose, sometimes the fish sees."

"What's in that paper bag?"

"My lunch."

"Hungh. . . . I might come along with you and hold the grasshoppers."

"Well, I tell you, I just don't go fishing with anybody. Other folks are always in too much of a hurry, and they fuss, and scare everything. I like just looking at things, and smelling all the good smells, and talking and singing to myself. But you can have my apple if you want it."

"Sure. Thanks."

"And I tell you what we can do to-morrow. You be here by my grasshopper field and we'll dig a cave together over on that hillside and I'll bring a shovel and lunch and everything."

"Sure. What'll ya bring to eat? . . ."

". . . There," said Jenny, strolling through the woods to the creek, "I got a can full of grasshoppers, and a brand-new friend. I *do* love summer!"

And then, at the end of summer, came fall, and school again, and the Gang at home.

Those carefree comfortable years up to twelve, say. Those easy, untroubled years, when all boys look more or less alike and the world rolls merrily on, so long as there is a good wind for kites in March, a level spot for marbles in April, a smooth pavement for tops in May, not to mention football in the fall and baseball in the spring, and stamps to paste in an album when it rains,—and all of it to do with the Gang, and the Gang all boys!

Ah, ladies, enjoy yourself in peace up to twelve, for from twelve on your troubles begin. The entire force of creation concentrates upon the female to influence her morning, noon, and night, to give up kites—"You're too old for that sort of thing"; to give up tops—"Jenny, you, a twelve-year-old girl, playing tops!"; to give up marbles—"Really, don't you think Jenny is much too old to be seen on the street playing marbles with boys?" At Christmas time a girl is given books bought from the shelf marked "For Girls." One refrain echoes from north, south, east, and west,—“You're too old now for that sort of thing—only

boys do that at your age." Jenny gets a sewing basket for Christmas, as well as books "For Girls." She gets a little cook book. The high-minded call it all "Education for Motherhood."

At least so it was when Jenny was young.

The high-minded need have little fear. They could better keep their hands off, for forces stronger than they are at work. The immeasurable pressure of all the high-minded who trod the wicked earth these last ten thousand years and more weighs upon our Jenny, and not only upon her, but still more to be mourned, upon her Gang. Jenny,—ha, what is the pressure of ten thousand years to Jenny? (So would argue Jenny at twelve.) But the Gang— What is one to do about it if the Gang, the beloved Gang itself, suddenly conceives a Great Plan—and leaves Jenny out? And when Jenny, half in tears, and half in rage, demands an explanation, she hears those words which up to yesterday haunted half the world through life: "Well, you see, it's this way,—you're a *girl*." No need to hurry the sewing basket and the cook book and the other books "For Girls." The Gang, catching untutored the spirit of ten thousand years, cries out, first apologetically, then defiantly, "You're a *Girl!*" The cry of the Gang as the Gang, yes. Until as the years come and go, one by one the members of the Gang beg singly and unashamed for our Jenny, or some other Jenny, because—she's a girl.

So the anxiety of the high-minded serves only to hasten slightly the inevitable.

And the most inevitable of all is Jenny herself. If only

the high-minded would concern themselves with their own high-mindedness and leave Jenny entirely alone, the forces of one hundred thousand years are at work in Jenny, and sooner or later, throbbing against every corner of her being, cries the soul and body for her forevermore, "I am a girl!" Cries it often despairingly, often bitterly, often apologetically, yet again and again valiantly, joyously, triumphantly, "I am a—woman!"

And so it was that by thirteen Jenny was learning to sew, Jenny was learning to cook, Jenny was given, though she never read them, special Christmas books "For Girls," and Jenny was in love.

That is, in love for thirteen. Which, in comparison, is often as much in love as a good many people ever fall. Usually, at thirteen, it is unrequited love, which is fortunate all around. Every one of us has enough bothersome episodes in her life to look back upon without adding to them any memory of how we would have deported ourselves at thirteen if the youth of fourteen we loved madly had loved us madly in return. Instead, backward glances toward those robust years reveal a picture of complete decorum. The adored never so much as looked our way.

By fourteen Jenny was in love again. Silent loves, those early ones, confided only to the girl next door and the cook, and, of course, her mother. Jenny's mother was almost always sick those years, alas. Nights she dressed in an old-rose soft silk gown and ate dinner downstairs, if she were well enough. Daytimes she stayed in her room,

and the nicest doctor in the world came to see how she was. As Jenny lay in bed nights planning out her life, she saw herself always as a certain tall slim lady on the order of an Elizabeth Johnson, president of the senior girls at school, and she saw the hero of her heart on his knees before her in a dimly lighted room, roses on a table near by, the scent of roses in the air, a box of chocolates on the sofa next her, and the hero always looked almost exactly like a cross between her Uncle Alec and the doctor. Since it was all so definite in her own mind, she saw no harm in incorporating her desires into the bedtime prayer. At least one could be perfectly honest and open with the God to whom one prayed. So it was "Our Father Who art in Heaven," followed by a statement of her own peculiar demands—or rather requests: "Please, dear Father, help me to look like Elizabeth Johnson when I'm grown up and please help him (she began it with a capital "h" in her mind, but once she tried writing it that way and it appeared too much as if she were referring to God) to look like Uncle Alec and the doctor." And she added, "May our Hearts and Souls work together, his and mine, in perfect peace and unity and service to Thee on High."

It was about then that Jenny had joined the church. Her mother was present for that. So was the doctor, to Jenny's exceeding joy. He did not sit with her mother.

"Why?" Jenny asked her mother.

"Because he wishes to sit with his wife," Jenny's mother told her. But every time Jenny sought the eyes of her mother they were looking over toward Dr. Cairns, and every time Jenny sought the eyes of Dr. Cairns, they were

looking toward her mother. Mrs. Cairns was always looking absorbingly toward the minister. Except once, when she smiled a most exceeding smile at Jenny's mother—an extremely healthy smile, the kind a person smiles who intends to stay on earth a long, long while, and in the meantime will take good care that her husband tends strictly to business.

Jenny's father had died two years before. It meant a black dress for the funeral and a good deal of excitement one way or another, which was most pleasurable. The whole block centered its activities for several days about Jenny and her mother. For a short time after that Jenny's mother was in much better health. Mrs. Cairns used to run in often and visit, coming at the most unexpected times. Now and then the doctor would be paying one of his professional calls. From upstairs Jenny could hear Mrs. Cairns' greeting as she entered the front parlor.

"Why, Mrs. Joslin, how *very* well you're looking!"

Dr. Cairns used to have to leave for other professional visits almost at once.

Then Jenny's mother got worse again, and practically every time, Jenny or the cook would have to tell Mrs. Cairns that she couldn't see any one,—no, not even Mrs. Cairns. About the only person she could see at all was the doctor.

How Jenny loved that doctor! After all there was an excuse for men in the world. It made it all so happy,—Jenny and her mother and the doctor.

"Don't you just *love* him?" Jenny asked her mother.

And once her mother, lying in her rose silk gown, took

Jenny's face between her hands and said, "Yes, I just love him."

Jenny laughed happily. "So do I!"

Therefore, while it worried Jenny's heart through the school hours to think her mother seemed to be getting worse, it was a good glad thought to know that Dr. Cairns had to call just that much more frequently. Often he was there when Jenny got back from school.

One day, after whirling home on her bicycle as fast as she could, she heard voices in the front parlor and dashed in, only to find Dr. and Mrs. Cairns there, and Mrs. Cairns was crying. Dr. Cairns was walking up and down the floor. Upstairs sat Jenny's mother in the sunny alcove of her room, very pale, and she too was crying. Not like Mrs. Cairns, but quietly. For a while after that Dr. Cairns did not come at all. Jenny's mother looked so pale and so shaky, and stared off into no place with such a queer expression on her face, that at last Jenny got worried and phoned Dr. Cairns herself.

"Is this Dr. Cairns?"

"Dr. Cairns speaking."

"This is Jenny—Jenny Joslin."

"What is it? What is it?"

Goodness, it was not really as bad as that. Jenny began to wish she had not phoned. But having phoned—

"Mother—"

"Yes, yes—I'll be right there!"

When she went upstairs again she found her mother still crying—she thought she would go to bed.

"Stay up until the doctor comes!"

"The—who? What did you say?"

"Dr. Cairns is coming."

"How do you know he is coming? Who said he was coming?"

"He said he was."

"When? Where?"

"Over the phone—just now."

"Did he phone here himself?"

"No, I phoned him."

"What did you say, child? You didn't tell him *I* wanted to see him, did you? Jenny, Jenny, just what *did* you say?"

"Why, I told him—I don't remember the exact words, but I was worried and thought I ought to send him word to come."

"But you didn't say *I* wanted him?"

"No, I said—I'm sure I said—anyhow I meant to say—that *I* wanted him."

"He's surely, surely coming?"

"He said he'd come right away."

"Jenny, Jenny. . . . I don't understand. He promised he'd not come again unless I sent for him specially, and I—I said . . . Oh, Jenny"—she sat there so drooping—"I said to myself—indeed I promised it to myself—that never, never would I call him—except, perhaps, just at the very end, to see him once. He promised—I don't understand. . . . You're sure—you're *sure* he's coming? . . . I—I wonder if I could have kept my end of it. . . . I was getting so weak—not just my body, you know. . . . My soul . . . I wonder if I could have waited till the end. . . ."

And just then the door opened and there stood Dr. Cairns. He looked to Jenny as if every patient he had must be dying. She glanced at her mother. For some strange reason the expression on her mother's face made Jenny suddenly burst into tears, so that there was nothing for her to do but leave the room at once.

It was all very strange indeed, very unexplainable.

Just about a month after that Jenny Joslin's mother died. It was odd that Dr. Cairns was not at the funeral. Mrs. Cairns was there.

After that, it was only when Jenny was sick that she ever saw Dr. Cairns. Her Aunt Emie always had Dr. Rawlins. The first time Aunt Emie was forced by Jenny's insistence to call Dr. Cairns, he suggested Dr. Rawlins for Jenny,—said it would be almost impossible for him to come himself. But Jenny refused Dr. Rawlins point-blank and finally phoned herself, at the risk of more chills, to Dr. Cairns. She reminded him, "You came so fast that time I called you for mother. What would she think if she knew you wouldn't come at all for me?"

So he came, much to Aunt Emie's most evident disapproval. "He's no kind of a doctor," Aunt Emie sniffed. "He's no kind of a man, either." Which one remark meant that a fog of dislike, intense dislike, completely hid Aunt Emie from Jenny's view from that moment on. She was no longer Aunt Emie. She was in the main an individual who did not like her mother's and her Dr. Cairns. Therefore everything about her was questionable.

When Dr. Cairns finally arrived Aunt Emie showed him up to Jenny's room, the one which used to be her mother's,

and whisked herself off righteously. Dr. Cairns sat down in a little stiff chair next to the bed and never said a word,—never asked where her aches and pains were, never felt her pulse, never looked at her tongue. He just sat.

“I’m sick!” Jenny said finally.

Still he just sat.

“I think it’s the grip,” Jenny said uneasily.

Jenny lay there in her mother’s bed and did not know just what to say or do next.

After what seemed a most peculiarly long time, Dr. Cairns dropped his head in his hands, and there he sat, for minutes and minutes and minutes. Jenny began to feel sorry for herself and very uncomfortable.

“I miss mother awfully!” Tears began to run down her feverish cheeks.

Just at that moment Aunt Emie whisked in again.

“Is Dr. Cairns finished?” she asked—the room.

“He’s not yet begun,” announced Jenny.

“Not yet begun?” Aunt Emie knit her brows.

“No. We were talking about mother.”

Aunt Emie tried to get out of the room so fast she opened the dressing-room door by mistake.

“She makes me sicker!” Jenny muttered after her.

When it was time to go Dr. Cairns said, “Don’t you think that while you’re sick and need a doctor you ought to be moved into another room,—say your own old room?”

“But why?”

“It’s quieter back there.”

“But I love being in mother’s room!”

"Well, don't you really think you had better have Dr. Rawlins?"

"Why should I have Dr. Rawlins? What in the world would mother think if I had Dr. Rawlins? She never had him inside the house!"

"You move into your own room and I'll come."

"But what difference does it make to you what room I'm in? . . . Oh—oh, is it that it makes you think of mother, being in her room? . . . But don't you like to have something remind you of mother? . . . And that reminds me," said Jenny,—Dr. Cairns just stood at the foot of the old mahogany bed and never spoke all this time—"that reminds me that I found a picture of mother I thought you might like. It's in the drawer of her sewing table over in the alcove!"

What Dr. Cairns did was just to walk out of the room and never take the picture or say good-by or "Thank you for thinking of me," or "I'll call again to-morrow," or anything. Could it be that he ever acted like that with her mother? How many queer things there were to get accustomed to in the world—

One could somehow manage to get along without one's mother if everything went just right. Nothing ever went just right with Aunt Emie. But Jenny had expected always to be able to count on Dr. Cairns. And now see. . . .

So she cried and got worse and refused to let Aunt Emie in the room at all, and finally there was nothing to do but send for Uncle Alec.

Indeed, indeed there was an excuse for men being in the world. Uncle Alec breezed in one sunny morning with

a large box of candy and some foolish magazines,—“the sort of things to cheer a young lady.”

“Oh, oh, Mr. Anderson!” Aunt Emie scowled.

“Don’t ‘Mr. Anderson’ me, Em.”

Aunt Emie went on scowling. “With Jenny sick in bed like this,—*candy!*”

“Do her good, Em, do her good!”

“Mr. Anderson, really—”

“The magazines are for you too, Em,—eh, boy?”

“*Mis*-ter Anderson! Such trash!”

And when she took herself off, her line of repartee being exhausted, Uncle Alec winked at Jenny. “Guess we’ve got the old girl on the run!”

So Uncle Alec exactly understood everything and Jenny laughed all morning long, but ate no chocolates because Aunt Emie had already presented the box to the cook.

At last Jenny could talk with some one about her mother! She had fully expected Dr. Cairns would meet her more than halfway. Far from it. But Uncle Alec—she and Uncle Alec talked hours and hours, and Jenny told him how wonderful and helpful Dr. Cairns had been. But he acted very peculiarly now, did Dr. Cairns. Uncle Alec smoked his pipe and said nothing. Just so had he sat one night in this very room a year before while Jenny’s mother lay in bed and talked hours and hours about how wonderful and helpful Dr. Cairns was. All the women Uncle Alec knew were always telling him how wonderful and helpful some man was, and Uncle Alec understood everything there was to understand in the whole world, and just smoked his pipe and said nothing. Once Uncle Alec

had been wonderful and helpful himself to a woman, and she had been wonderful and helpful to him, so of course Uncle Alec understood everything. But that was rather long ago now,—long as one counts days and nights and nights and days, and days and nights again. But it is only the individuals concerned who measure by days and nights and nights and days again. Fortunately the rest of the world merely asks, "How many years ago was it that Cynthia Norris married Dr. Rawlins?"

But Cynthia Norris having married Dr. Rawlins, Uncle Alec was a rare visitor to Jenny's town, and when he came he mostly sat around the Joslin home and smoked his pipe, which was always as every one in the Joslin household would have it. That is, until this last visit, when Aunt Emie for two well-defined reasons objected. One was, she strongly disliked a pipe; the other, she strongly disliked Alec Anderson.

"When is your Uncle Alec leaving?" she inquired of Jenny the third morning.

"When we get through talking about Dr. Cairns and about mother," announced Jenny.

Aunt Emie was in a continual state of whisk. She could never get comfortably settled any place, but a turn in the conversation forced her to seek moral shelter in some other quarter of the house. Uncle Alec bumped into her removing herself downstairs.

"Hey, Em, come on up and sit in Jenny's room for a spell!"

"I've just left Jenny's room." And Aunt Emie went down and froze in the front parlor. It is especially com-

forting to certain moral natures to be forced to freeze or get overheated because of the spiritual shortcomings of others. It brings home to them how inexcusable the spiritual shortcomings of others are.

"I say, Jen," Uncle Alec leaned against the mantelpiece in the room which had been Jenny's mother's, "I say, what kind of a man are you going to marry when you grow up?"

"A cross between you and Dr. Cairns," Jenny informed him, "with all of father left out."

"So—? And if a cross between Dr. Cairns and your loving Uncle Alec fails to find in you exactly what that mixture's soul is searching for in the line of a life mate, what then?"

"Nothing like that ever happens to me," announced Jenny.

"Or suppose he married you and the mixture doesn't turn out to be all you desire?"

"Nothing like that ever happens to me," announced Jenny again.

"Or—suppose—suppose"—Uncle Alec puffed away on his pipe—"suppose the mixture might already be married to somebody else?"

"*That?*" cried Jenny. "Oh, *that* would never, *never* happen to me!"

"So . . ." mused Uncle Alec. "What a very fortunate person you are going to be! Extremely fortunate, I should say. Quite, indeed, the most fortunate person in all the world!"

"I always am," said Jenny.

CHAPTER II

I

"I THINK," announced Aunt Emie one evening after a rather silent supper, "that it had better be Vassar or Bryn Mawr."

"What had?" asked Jenny.

"The college you go to."

"*I?* The college *I* go to? Vassar? Bryn Mawr? Good gracious, Aunt Emie, are you crazy?"

"Jenny!"

"*I* in a girls' college?"

"It was your father's wish."

"My father's wish! Well, all the more reason—"

"Jenny, for several years I've noticed a tendency on your part to speak lightly of your father's memory. It is exceedingly painful to me. Your father was one of the finest men that ever lived, honest, upright, God-fearing. He never indulged in any vices whatsoever."

"What makes you talk about him like that just because he's dead?"

"What do you mean?"

"He wasn't any of those things, that is, comfortably. I don't like words like 'honest,' 'upright,' 'God-fearing.' What's the use of such words? A person can be all of those things, and yet you can be glad when they die."

"Jenny!"

"It's true. You think you're honest. You are—just the way father used to be. Yet you call 'Jenny!' at me that way and that's not honest. Why can't you say sometimes that you're glad a certain person dies?"

"Jenny!"

"There you go again. I don't care—it's not my business. Anyhow I was glad when father died, and I'm as sure as if she told me that mother was."

"Jenny Joslin, how dare you!"

"There you go again. She was . . . You'd never call Uncle Alec honest, upright, God-fearing, but it just wouldn't be the same world if Uncle Alec died."

"Uncle Alec!" The scorn of Aunt Emie.

"Yes, Uncle Alec! He'd just hate being called 'upright,'—you try it sometime!"

"You needn't worry, I never shall!"

"And Dr. Cairns,—I never heard you call him 'God-fearing,' yet next to mother's death I felt the worst of all my life when Dr. Cairns died."

"There were some," remarked Aunt Emie tersely, "who felt the town had not suffered such a great moral loss when Dr. Cairns died."

"Aunt Emie!" cried Jenny.

"Indeed, most certainly one could never refer to Dr. Cairns as 'upright' or 'God-fearing'!"

"And what," demanded Jenny, "did Dr. Cairns ever do in this world that was not perfect?"

"I'd rather not discuss it with you at your age."

Jenny just stared at her. "I don't believe it!" she said at length.

"You don't even know what it is," Aunt Emie reminded her.

"I don't care—I don't want to know—I don't believe it!"

"But it's true. And when you get a little older, and understand more about the world, I shall tell you all about it."

"I don't want to know! I don't, won't, shan't believe it! Dr. Cairns was perfect!"

"Indeed, he was very far from perfect. He was, to put it mildly, immoral."

"Dr. Cairns—*immoral*? He was no such thing!"

"But you see, my dear, I happen to know that he was!"

"He was not!"

"Indeed, my dear Jenny, he was!"

"He was not!"

"Since you are so sure, I shall tell you then. Dr. Cairns, my dear, was—in—love—with—your—mother!"

Jenny looked at Aunt Emie, and looked and looked. "So—that was immoral, was it?"

"I was afraid you were too young to understand."

"I certainly am too young to understand." And it was Jenny's turn to whisk out of the room, leaving Aunt Emie to take that comforting refuge of all relatives in the assurance that whoever the child in question is, he or she strongly resembles the other side of the family. . . . However, it would be Vassar or Bryn Mawr.

Upstairs in her mother's room, Jenny dropped into the big easy-chair in the alcove. She sat there in the dark and gazed down the street at the lights,—lights in the homes

of neighbors. Upright, God-fearing people, she supposed Aunt Emie would call them. Or were they? Suddenly the world took on a peculiar twist. The world that Jenny loved, her own pet world that laughed and played and sang for her each day. She loved it so! And the people—she loved the people, except just one or two,—Aunt Emie, and—and—Aunt Emie. People were—why, they were wonderful! The most wonderful of all had been her mother. Next came Dr. Cairns and Uncle Alec. And Dr. Cairns was “immoral”! Immoral, because he loved her mother! Who could have helped loving her mother? And were there then some folks in the world who could love, and be moral, and some who could not love without being immoral? No, no, no!

Jenny thought back over everything she could remember of Dr. Cairns and her mother. The look which always came over her mother’s face when Jenny dashed upstairs and called “The doctor!” Sometimes she used to come into her mother’s room and there her mother and Dr. Cairns would be sitting—just sitting. Jenny thought the doctor had gone, because she heard no talking at all. So she often walked in without knocking, only to find Dr. Cairns and her mother—just sitting. Both of them always appeared very contented,—it always struck Jenny as peculiar that anybody could seem so pleased, just doing nothing at all, not even talking. Other times she would knock, hearing their voices. Often no one called “Come in,” so she just went in anyhow, and stayed a bit, and went out again, and evidently neither of them knew she had been there, so earnest was their conversation. It was enough to hurt a

body's feelings. Two last things she remembered. The time her mother took Jenny's face in her hands and said, "Yes, I just love him." And the way her mother's face looked that time when she had not seen Dr. Cairns for several weeks, and the way his face looked.

"She would not have looked at him the way she did if she had thought he was immoral," decided Jenny.

And so the whole matter was settled. But she would sound Aunt Emie on one other point. She found her way to the door and went downstairs again.

"I say, Aunt Emie, mother loved Dr. Cairns, didn't she?"

"My dear Jenny, the less said about the whole affair, the better. I regret that the matter ever came up at all."

"Well, but didn't she?"

"Your mother never took me into her confidence."

"Did Dr. Cairns?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then how did you know so positively he loved mother?"

"Well, of course, it was common—that is, everybody suspected it. His practice fell off decidedly. It was very hard indeed on poor Mrs. Cairns that was."

Again Jenny looked and looked at her Aunt Emie.

"But if—or granted—that mother *did* love Dr. Cairns was she too then—'immoral'?"

"My dear Jenny, it is certainly not my place to discuss your mother's character."

"But was she?"

"My dear Jenny, it is not for me to say *what* your mother was."

"But you didn't hesitate to say what Dr. Cairns was, and I loved him and Uncle Alec next best to mother!"

"But Dr. Cairns was no relation to you."

"There you go again! What has that got to do with it? It's much more important not to speak unkindly of folks another person loves than be particular just because they're relatives. You told me my Dr. Cairns was immoral, and I've got to know if you think mother was immoral too."

"Well, at least, she was not *as* immoral as Dr. Cairns."

"But was she immoral at all?"

"Well, my dear Jenny—"

"*Was* she? Yes or no!"

"Jenny!"

"Yes or no!"

"Well, yes."

"So then. That's just what I wanted you to say. Now I know that it doesn't make the least bit of difference what you had to say about Dr. Cairns either. It didn't anyhow."

At the door she turned again.

"Why wasn't mother exactly as 'immoral' as Dr. Cairns?"

"Well, then, if you must know, she wasn't quite so—"

"Say it, 'immoral'! Every time you say it I feel better all over."

"She was not quite so immoral as Dr. Cairns because—because your father had already died."

Again Jenny looked and looked.

"So—father's dying made mother somewhat moral. . . ."

"Jenny, my dear Jenny!"

"But you just said it yourself."

"I mean, had your dear father been alive, your mother perhaps,—that is, we shall hope—would not have—cared—for Dr. Cairns."

"What would that have had to do with it?"

"Jenny!"

"But, if father's dying made mother—moral, why was she immoral at all?"

"Because Dr. Cairns was a married man."

"Oho, so that's what it's all about! So,—it was Mrs. Cairns' not dying, Mrs. Cairns' insisting on staying alive, that made mother 'immoral'! . . . It's too mixed up for me!" Jenny shrugged her shoulders and opened the door.

"That was just it," said Aunt Emie, with magnificent wit, "it was too mixed up for everybody!"

Upstairs, in the dark again, Jenny's brain thumped. Whoever could have guessed there were people in the world who talked like Aunt Emie? Moral—immoral; immoral—moral. And mixing *love* up with any of that! As if loving, *loving*, could ever be anything but splendid and good and right!

And then, suddenly, she remembered the time she dashed into the front parlor that afternoon by mistake and found Mrs. Cairns crying, and Dr. Cairns walking the floor. Loving—loving ought only to make everybody happy. It was indeed too bad—oh, very much too bad—if it all—if anything her beautiful mother and her wonderful Dr. Cairns did—felt—made Mrs. Cairns cry. Oh dear, oh dear, it certainly was too bad. It was too bad to make anybody cry about anything. Why, why, did love have

to make anybody cry? It all got much more complicated the more Jenny thought about it.

And then, because the world could not look troubled for long at a stretch, Jenny started to undress in the dark thinking of her beautiful mother and her wonderful Dr. Cairns. "And besides," she comforted herself, "Mrs. Cairns lost no time in marrying the minister."

As she rolled over in the mahogany bed of her mother's she sniffed, "Vassar! Bryn Mawr!"

2

The main reason it was to be neither Vassar nor Bryn Mawr was, of course, that Jenny was too concerned with a certain William Lamar. William Lamar could attend neither Vassar nor Bryn Mawr. Reason number one. Reason number two was that Aunt Emie wanted her to go to Vassar or Bryn Mawr. Reason number three, Aunt Emie had said her father wanted it. Reason number four, nobody she knew was going to Vassar or Bryn Mawr, and everybody she knew—who was going any place at all—was going to Hastings. So, all in all, it would decidedly be Hastings for her. For William Lamar and her.

She dropped a note on Billy's desk the next day at school. "It's all decided. I'm going to Hastings!"

And after the next hour Billy dropped a note on her desk. "I'm darn glad."

So Romance was on the wing, off toward the hills in the direction of Hastings. And on the chimes tower just back of the Botany Building Romance preened her many-

colored plumage, and waited until William Lamar and Jenny Joslin came to college.

Where can one search to learn the spirit of a university, especially a university open to both men and women? With what scales does one weigh the richness of her gifts, her limitations? No one passes through any college gate a Freshman, and out at the end of four years a graduate, without the imprint of over a thousand days resting forever on the soul. "Resting"—alas, too often "resting." That any part of the sum total of a thousand days could ever merely "rest"!

But it is the academic side of university life which ever can or does play a negative part. There is that vast, dynamic side of human relationships, with its very positive influence for good or ill which permeates in and through and around every classroom. Few can come in contact with their fellow beings seven days and not have a new direction given to thought or action, unconscious though it is wont to be.

Who then could ever measure the total reaction of over a thousand days? Who could ever measure the difference in that reaction when, for those thousand days, men and women are thrown constantly together, or when, for those thousand days, they are entirely, except for matters out of the ordinary, apart? Is it small, is it great? Is it for good or evil?

"It puts too much romance into life, throwing young men and women together at that age!"

"It takes too much romance out of life, throwing men and women together at that age!"

"They don't study enough!"

But then who does, nowadays, in any institution of learning?

3

The first year in college is tragedy for some natures, as is the first year out of college. Usually in college, as in the world at large, those who are most self-sufficing and independent are the ones who draw unto themselves others ready to help at every turn. Souls hungry for the spoken word and the helping hand go by unnoticed in the bustling crowd. The meek would many times exchange the holy promise of the earth for a few friends here and now. Meanwhile Jenny, who possessed not a meek inch in her entire system, found herself confused with the numbers who paid her their student homage. Her friends at home in the town she considered her very own she had always been grateful for. "Thank You, God!" she called heavenwards many a time, as she thought of the boys and girls she could count on through thick and thin. She had been born among them. They were hers. Most of them,—all indeed but a small handful,—she left at home when she, along with the small handful, went away "to college."

How was she to know that new friends, people whose existence she had been entirely unaware of, were to rush into her life and fill it to the brim? She really started

college with the idea of studying—when she was not to be with Billy Lamar, or doing something else. Of course she would see the girls from home every so often.

Every so often had been enough for Jenny to see of her own kind, except at the more interesting stages of each "love affair." Then it was pleasant to have a confidante. They were exceedingly mild things, those love affairs, as love affairs go. Jenny had standards from goodness knows where. Her mother had never preached to her against the iniquities of over-intimacy. Her Aunt Emie never had, or Jenny surely would have turned around and laid her head upon the shoulder of the next youth who called. In her thirties Jenny wondered once where those early standards ever had evolved from, and as near as she could arrive at their source was to remember a remark of her Uncle Alec's: "She's the kind of a woman who makes a fool of herself with a man."

Jenny had asked her Uncle Alec what he meant.

"I don't know exactly. She just—she doesn't know how to act."

"How should she act?" Jenny was all for knowing.

"Behave herself!" And that was as definite as Uncle Alec chose to get.

Yet at the age of fourteen, twenty-four, forty, who can say that a woman behaves herself because she behaves herself, or because nothing sufficiently interesting as a reason for doing anything else but behave herself ever has turned up? Jenny was not one to say. She had a spotless record of complete decorum toward the male sex during her youth. She fully realized, however, that every boy she had ever

been enamored of had an equally spotless record, as far as she was concerned. There were spells when she felt like taking the credit to herself. In other moments she was not so sure but that she might just as well send up another "Thank You, God!" for the kind of male friends He had sent her way. She was decorous. They were decorous. Everybody behaved. At that rate Jenny's record might have stayed spotless to the bitter end. An uninteresting notion. Rather a bore of a world almost every honest soul would consider it to be if no situation ever developed which made it entirely worth one's while—and never a pang afterwards—for one at least a little to misbehave.

Since then Jenny, in the course of those youthful "love affairs," never misbehaved, why the need of a confidante? Goodness knows. But she found no end of things to talk about, did Jenny. There may have been confidantes who felt that Jenny could have bestirred herself and made her intimate confessions somewhat more thrilling. To Jenny's notions they were thrilling enough. She was more interested in tennis and swimming and horseback riding and sailing and tramping than she was in thrills. As long as there was always one boy at every party more anxious to dance with her than with any other girl, Jenny asked for nothing more. Literally, for nothing more. Two boys in that state made life confusing. One at a time was quite enough.

Billy Lamar was the one-at-a-time when Jenny started college. The first two days of college Jenny and he were together most of the time. They planned to take the same courses, the same professors. Tuesday and Friday after-

noons they would play tennis. Saturday afternoons they would go walking.

And then of a sudden Jenny realized three weeks had passed and she had not seen Billy Lamar once. Beginning with the third day she found herself surrounded with new friends, city girls, older girls, sophisticated girls, well-dressed girls. She was invited here and there. Everybody gave her advice about her college work and every one suggested changes, and since it made not the least difference to Jenny what subjects she took, she followed agreeably every suggestion possible. Within three weeks she had changed her "major" from Philosophy to History to Economics to Political Science. Each sounded more alluring as its particular claims were put forth by some girl anxious to impress Jenny with her friendliness.

At the end of three weeks of lunches and dinners and dances and receptions and picnics and heart-to-heart talks, Jenny told some girl whose name she was not quite sure of that she would join her fraternity. Whereupon some thirty girls appeared from goodness knows where and all hurled themselves upon Jenny and kissed her and told her how glad they were she was to be one of their sacred number. Jenny could remember the names of three of them. A few hours later some other girl put her arm around Jenny and asked if she would join the One and Only, being another fraternity, and Jenny's heart nearly broke not to be able to say yes, the girl looked so fearfully hurt. The next day some other girl also whose name Jenny had no idea of, told Jenny how much she loved her and would she join the Grandest and Best, and again Jenny's heart

weighed heavy indeed at seeing the girl's disappointed face. By that time Jenny was not quite sure where she belonged or who were the friends who embraced her publicly and who smote her with their crushed glances. The world was very mixed indeed. One of everything at a time was enough of everything.

Then she remembered Billy Lamar.

But Billy Lamar had been going through lunches and dinners and "glad-handings" of his own. Only he had not forgotten Jenny. He had tried to reach her by telephone fourteen times, and then gave up. At the beginning of the fourth week he got a note in his Monday morning's mail:

"You're a nice kind of a friend! I'll go to Vassar next time."

Full of dismay he dashed for Jenny's boarding house, escorted her to the nine o'clock class she had changed three times, and was entirely forgiven.

4

When people fall in love young enough and gradually enough they grow into each other's lives. It becomes difficult to know, between the two, where one personality ends and the other begins. Much of the happy turmoil and upheaval of older and more sudden love affairs is absent. Romance takes life easily,—easily and comfortably and cheerily. What is lost in the thrills of despair and achievement, the stirring doubts and glad surrenderings in the loves of later years, is gained in tranquillity and that plastic

fitting of nature to nature which only the young can accomplish. It is not so much that they fall in love as that they glide into it. Few, if any, are the weighings and misgivings.

College is a healthy place to fall in love, on the whole. There is such a great deal going on all the time, not to mention classes to attend for the conscientious—and Jenny was conscientious, though bored. There is no time to moon about sighing and growing pale or indignant or over-amorous, as do unoccupied folk who are in love at tender years. Just gradually, and more and more, Jenny realized she preferred doing everything she did, provided it were possible, with Billy Lamar,—preferred being with Billy Lamar to being alone. Jenny always knew that when she got to that point she would be perilously near being in love. Billy Lamar preferred being in the company of Jenny Joslin to anything else he knew of.

He told her so one night. It was the end of their Sophomore year and Jenny was secretary of the Dramatic Club, and treasurer of the Debating Club, and business manager of the Mandolin Club, a reporter on the *Hastings Daily*, and president of the Sophomore girls' tennis club. In and out of these activities she helped decorate halls for dances and booths for fairs and spent untold effort at every party making herself and everybody else miserable trying to find partners for girls who could not manage it themselves without extraneous pressure. After each party she marveled that she had any friends left. But what could she do?—dance herself with other girls sitting bravely against the wall?

"What's your name?" she would ask an ill-starred girl who had two dances taken out of a possible twenty and was now sitting out her fourth in succession.

"Anabelle Browne."

"Wait a second—I'll get a partner."

"Oh, don't bother!"

Jenny dragged her own impatient but inured partner around until she discovered a male person trying for a few moments to call his soul his own.

"I beg your pardon, but what's your name?"

"Why, a—Phelps."

"Oh, Mr. Phelps, will you do a great favor for me? I'll do one for you some day! I say, there's a girl sitting there by that palm. I suspect she dances terribly and all that. But *do* let me introduce you and ask her for this dance. I'll bless you forever!"

Poor Mr. Phelps. Poor Jenny's martyred-looking partner, already half the dance gone. Agitated Miss Anabelle Browne, who careered off heavily in the arms of the luckless conscript. She did dance terribly and all that.

But Mr. Phelps like as not asked Jenny for a dance later on, all forgiveness, and put his name down for the eighty-third extra.

And Jenny appointed Anabelle Browne on a committee to address Benefit Day circulars, and Anabelle Browne was again agitated. At last she was taking root! She addressed so many circulars that Jenny asked her to help collect funds for a memorial sundial. She collected so much money that Jenny made her assistant treasurer of the Mandolin Club, and by the time she was a Senior,

Anabelle Browne was Recording Secretary of the Student Body. On such slender threads hang our destinies. . . . But Mr. Phelps never asked her to dance again, nor did any one who ever asked her once. That was something Jenny realized was beyond her powers of adjustment. The Lord had not dealt kindly in all respects with Miss Anabelle Browne.

It was shortly after this same dance, the *début* of Anabelle Browne, that Billy Lamar told Jenny he liked being with her better than anything else—in the world. When one adds “in the world” that way to a statement it is bound to cause flutterings.

So that was probably the night Jenny started being in love with her William.

Some women proceed at stated intervals to fall in love with men,—just so-so, regardless. The man who stirs up such a flutter in the female heart may never so much as guess that the lady takes notice of the fact that he is alive. And she all the time tearing her hair days and weeping nights and suffering upheavals in her soul enough to drive her to six psychoanalysts at once. There are other women who seem to find it quite impossible to fall in love at all unless the man falls first. The very act of his falling, provided he falls in a way to let the lady know about it, and provided the lady likes him at all and is not already in love with somebody else, produces the effect of causing the lady’s heart to become agitated in turn, and before she knows it, she is in love herself—without last week having dreamt of such a thing.

When William Lamar said, “You know, Jenny, more

and more I realize that I like being with you better than any one else—in the world!” Jenny’s heart started in to palpitate decidedly faster than normal, and she knew her face must be as red as the Sophomore banner. And William’s agitation having considerably increased through such a declaration, he could not refrain from putting his hand over Jenny’s on the railing of the fraternity balcony and leaving it there.

Whereupon he became so wrought up and alarmed at his general condition that he failed to see Jenny again for a week, and when he did appear one evening after seven days of wretchedness, Jenny glared at him.

“Where have you been for a whole week?”

“I say, Jenny, let’s take a walk.”

After they had walked over to the lake and sat down under a maple tree by Parson’s Cove, William asked her, “Does it make any difference to you if you don’t see me for a week?”

“Yes, it does,” said Jenny. “I hate it.”

A long pause.

“Jenny, I’m going to leave college.”

“Billy!”

“Yes, I am. I’m going to work!”

“Billy! What for?”

“I—I want to earn money. I—why I—I’d like to get married—some day.”

Jenny would not have asked him “To whom?” for a thousand dollars, because she knew perfectly well, and hated the idea of sounding—the word which came into her own mind was “kittenish.”

"You see, it's this way. If I stay in college four years it would be two years perhaps before I'd be earning enough to get married, and that's too long,—if she cares at all. It's too long for me anyhow."

"Yes, four years is—oh, it's fearfully long! But it seems terrible for you not to graduate!"

"What's the use? Most of it is an awful bore anyhow. I'd rather be out in the world doing something."

"And the tennis team!"

"I know, I hate like anything leaving the tennis team!"

Another long pause.

"Jenny, if you would ever marry me, wouldn't you rather marry me soon—than wait four years?"

"What do you mean by soon, Billy?"

"Well, what do you?"

"Of course—'soon' could mean—to-morrow."

"I wish—oh, I wish it could be to-morrow! . . . Don't I wish I had a lot of money!"

"No, to-morrow wouldn't do anyhow, Billy. Anything as—as wonderful as getting married, people ought to look forward to and plan for and dream about. I don't like the idea of—of sort of jumping in with both feet."

"But how long do you think you'd need to 'look forward'? I've been looking forward, more or less, a whole year, off and on. And the last week it's all I've done at all. As far as this looking-forward idea of yours goes, I've had enough already. . . . Jenny, how soon *would* you marry me?"

"Goodness, Billy, I suppose there must be some things

a person ought to do and get ahead of time. I suppose really you ought to get a job."

"Yes, of course I'll get a job. How much do you suppose I ought to have saved up before—before—"

"I don't suppose we need anything saved up. Just get a job,—I suppose you'd better get a job first."

"And a house, Jenny? Ought we to get a house first or afterwards?"

"Oh, let's get it together afterwards!"

"Well, then, say—say we— Oh, good Lord, Jenny, I just can hardly say it at all. Say we get married in—in two months!"

"Two months—oh, Billy! . . . And I promised to get the Dramatic Club out of debt next year and I was as good as promised the lead in the Junior Play and I did want so to do something worth while in tennis. And I was just elected secretary of the fraternity for next year and treasurer of the History Club, and I was to have charge of 'rushing' at the house. . . . But I surely would much rather get married to you, Billy!"

"Jenny—Jenny—I'll make you happy, I swear to God I'll make you happy!"

Whereupon William Lamar put his arm around Jenny and caught her hands and kissed her long, long, long. . . .

A thousand times Jenny had imagined what it would be like to have a man kiss her,—how she would stand, what she would do with her hands, what the man would do with his. And what really, *really*, would the kiss itself be like? . . .

It was very much more wonderful than anything that had ever happened in all her life, so full of wonderful things.

That night in bed she decided that since being kissed was really quite the most glorious thing in all the world, she was very glad indeed that she had not been wasting kisses on any boy who came along, and instead had saved them all, every single one, for Billy Lamar.

Her Billy Lamar!

CHAPTER III

THE next morning Jenny trod the lowly earth with a feeling that she was apart from all creation. The day before, had she happened to think of it, she was one with everybody and everything—her world, her dear loved world. But now—did not last night place her where no other mortal had ever reached, in a position no other mortal could understand? She was engaged to be married! True, other girls had been and were now engaged to be married—but no one else to Billy Lamar! And besides all of that, *she* knew what it was like to have a man kiss her. True, other girls had been, were being, would be kissed by men—but no one else by Billy Lamar!

“_____ Miss Joslin?”

Thump! . . . “I—I didn’t quite hear.”

“I asked you a question concerning the Fall of Rome.”

“I—I didn’t quite hear.”

“Did the rest of the class have any difficulty in hearing the question? Miss Joslin possibly did not retire early enough last night. Miss Anabelle Browne, why the expression ‘Fall of Rome’?”

“He’s sacrilegious!” muttered Jenny to herself. “The idea of his referring to last night!”

Such a relief to think one was to be done with all this ancient stuff. Instead, to be marrying Billy Lamar!

For the first time since she started college Jenny absented

herself from a class. The next hour, instead of attending Natural Science 32, "The Prevention of Citrus Fruit Diseases" (it was always hard finding a two-hour course for Tuesday and Thursday at ten; almost every one took "N. S. 32" and read the *Hastings Weekly* Thursdays—it was distributed from nine to ten; Tuesdays Jenny sat next the girl who was assisting her as Chairman of the Oriental Ball and they discussed plans) . . . instead of attending Natural Science 32 Jenny walked exactly in the opposite direction, to the Library, got out her notebook, and wrote a letter.

"HASTINGS LIBRARY, Thursday, 10 A.M.

"DEAREST UNCLE ALEC:—

"I always knew I'd tell you first. It's the most beautiful piece of news in all the world! Guess what—? I'm going to be married in two months! Isn't it grand, grand, *grand*? Oh, Uncle Alec, I always knew the world was the most wonderful place in all creation. Now it's so marvelous I just don't see how I can hold in! I'm *bursting* of joy! You'll be at the wedding! Why, Uncle Alec, I just happened to think—you'll have to be the one to give me away! Oh, oh, oh, Uncle Alec—isn't it *grand*? Write me quick and say 'God bless you, my beloved niece!'

"Hello, Uncle Alec!

"Your loving, loving,

"JENNY.

"P.S.—Of course it's Billy Lamar. Think of it, Uncle Alec—ME—Mrs. William Lamar!!!"

The very sight of which "Mrs." set Jenny off into a whirl of daydreams, and before she knew it she was alone in the library because all the woe-begone and forlorn, those pitiable souls not engaged to William Lamar, never kissed by William Lamar, had gone home to lunch.

Two days later a Freshman called up in a hoarse whisper to Jenny, "Hey, Jen, your uncle's here!"

What in the world— Oh, joy! And down the stairs two steps at a time flew Jenny and hurled herself into the arms of Uncle Alec.

"What in the world—! Oh, I'm glad to see you!"

"You, Jenny—you. Why it was only yesterday I fished you out of the lake at home, three years old. You, Jenny!"

"Uncle Alec—you're not going to say I'm too young!"

"Too young? Never, Jenny! Think of it—you're twenty years old! Fact of it is, I'd begun to worry,—thought you'd be an old maid. Began to feel sorry for you. And William? Let's see, William must be all of—"

"Oh, he's older still,—he's twenty-one!"

"Just think, twenty-one! Poor old Bill. . . . Twenty-one. It's well he found some one at last!"

"Uncle Alec!"

"Come on, Jen, let's take a walk."

So out they went, Uncle Alec more than twice the age of Jenny's William, yet wondering, after all, if it were only yesterday that he and Cynthia Norris were window shopping for a dining-room table. And then eating lunch together at the little restaurant above Maynard's—pretending they had just decided to eat out for a change instead of going "home." And that afternoon, sitting the whole afternoon in the park—the most perfect afternoon of his life. And that evening, supper in the little basement restaurant by the corner of Broadway and Third Avenue—his and her beloved rendezvous. And that night, by the lake, the

most perfect—no, no, every night with her was the most perfect of his life.

And the next day he made up his mind that he should never marry his adored Cynthia Norris until he had money enough to buy her the finest dining-room table in the land, and until, after they were married, he could take her to Maynard's itself to have lunch. Money—he must make money, that Cynthia Norris might have only the best!

But Alec Anderson was not born under a moneyed star. It was nothing to Cynthia Norris. He had been born, that was the main thing. They could get along—"oh, Alec—on nothing!"

Alec Anderson worked too hard and waited too long. He did not meet Cynthia Norris until he and she were twenty-five. At thirty she went to visit Jenny's mother and met Dr. Rawlins and somehow— Alec Anderson could never blame her in the least. He had not at forty-five been able to earn enough to buy Cynthia Norris the finest dining-room table in the land, which was the only kind she deserved.

"Uncle Alec, you will give me away at the wedding, won't you?"

Come back—or rather come ahead, Uncle Alec, those fifteen years and more. Your Dream is long ended—ended, except to go on dreaming. And here is Jenny, twenty, in the rosy, glowing midst of the Wonderful Thing.

"Just as you say, my Jenny!"

And then he decided to come at once to the subject which had brought him to Hastings.

"Jenny, you know, I feel an awful responsibility for you.

I never realized how great until I got your letter. You've no mother or father. Of course there's your Aunt Em—I know,—don't say anything,—I know your Aunt Em as well as you do. I realize I'm the only grown person you feel very close to, and goodness, it has scared me to think of you being old enough to get married and no mother—no person—to—to talk to or anything. . . .”

“But, Uncle Alec—”

“No, don't interrupt me, because it's the darndest hardest job I ever tackled, talking like this to you. I've been rehearsing it all the way on the train. . . . It's *darn* hard. . . . I say, Jenny, you really intend to get married?”

“Why, Uncle Alec, what a question!”

“Yes, yes, of course. It was just that if you *had* changed your mind or anything, I'd . . . I'd not feel I had to go on with what I had to say. . . . It's just this, Jenny. . . . I do feel so *darn* responsible. . . . It's harder saying it than I thought for. But what I had in mind . . . I say, Jenny, what do you know about getting married, anyhow?”

“How do you mean? I don't understand.”

“I mean . . . I mean . . . What . . . Do you know what getting married *means*?”

“Why, it means . . . it means . . . that you live with the man you love most in all the world.”

“Yes, yes, but do you know what that ‘living’ means?”

“Why, it means . . . it means . . . *everything*.”

“Jenny, do you realize it means . . . he's the—the father of your children?”

“Heavens, Uncle Alec—heavens! Who else would be?”

“Yes, yes, of course. But do you know . . . Good God,

I wish you had a mother. I wish your Aunt Em weren't such a fool. Do you know what being the father of your children means? How much *do* you know, Jenny?"

"Oh—oh . . . I begin to see what you're driving at. Why, Uncle Alec, if you mean that—I know—I understand—all about where babies come from, and all that."

"*Do* you though—everything about it?"

"Well, of course, everything's a big word. But mother told me all about how babies are born when I was ten or eleven years old. And then just before she died she told me some more."

"Yes, yes—well, and what else? What more do you know?"

"What more? Why, isn't that enough?"

"You mean, since you were thirteen or fourteen nobody has told you anything?"

"Why, what more was there to know? Mother told me not to talk about what she told me because girls my age wouldn't perhaps understand and it would be better if I kept it all to myself. So I've never mentioned it from that day to this."

"But you must have picked up more information somehow. You've heard other girls talking—"

"No, never a word. I've never heard a single soul mention the subject, and I've never mentioned it myself."

"Jenny—you're twenty and you've never heard other girls—any one—discuss men, marriage, and all that?"

"Oh, yes, we've discussed men, marriage, and all that, only—only very broadly, we'll say. Nobody ever got near details."

"But you must have heard stories about it all!"

"But I never did!"

"Haven't you wondered about things?"

"No,—mother answered all the questions I could think of asking, and I never have thought of any new ones since. I've never thought much about it, one way or the other. Why is it all so important?"

"Because it is! It's terribly important! I'm sure at thirteen your mother couldn't have told you all you ought to know."

"Perhaps not. Well, then, you start in and tell me."

"Lord, Jenny. . . . Good Lord . . . I don't know where to begin. I don't believe you really know one thing about what men are really like, or can be like."

"Billy's so wonderful! And you! And Dr. Cairns was!"

"Heigh-ho, Jenny, may you never have cause to change your mind. . . . Little Jenny. . . . Dear little Jenny. . . . You're so darn young . . . I don't believe you know a thing."

"There is one thing I think I'll ask about." Jenny frowned and looked off over the lake. "Why is it that kissing a man makes you feel so queer all over? Why does it make you feel so much as if you wanted more, and more, and more? It sort of scares me—how I've felt ever since last Wednesday night. Is it—is it all right to feel like that?"

Uncle Alec looked over the lake. He puffed away on the old pipe and narrowed his eyes.

"It would be all wrong if you didn't feel like that."

"Uncle Alec—I'm so glad, so glad I asked you!"

And Jenny threw her arms around his neck to the temporary despair of the pipe.

They sat silent for a spell. Finally Uncle Alec asked her, "Do you want to have children?"

"*Do* I want to have *children*? Why, Uncle Alec!"

"So . . . I see. How many?"

"Twelve."

"I say, Jenny, come down to earth."

"Honest, twelve."

"You'll run out of names."

"No, I won't. They're named already. Five were easy, —after mother, you, Dr. Cairns, Billy, and me. Five, you see are the irreducible minimum."

"And the other seven?"

"We've had the expression in a sociology course: I told Billy five were the subsistence minimum, and twelve the comfort minimum."

"Aha! I'd call it the other way 'round. . . . None of the twelve do you consider luxuries?"

"No, none."

"And you've discussed it already with your William, and he agrees?"

"He says anything I say about anything suits him."

"As to supporting twelve children?"

"We won't have all twelve the first year! As each baby arrives Billy will be earning more money."

"Quite simple. I see. . . . You don't mind if I remind you of this conversation after you have been married twelve years, say."

"Not a bit! There'll be at least ten wonderful little—

little Lamars (oh, Uncle Alec!) staring you in the face when you mention it!"

"And if there are only two wonderful little—little Lamars?"

"Uncle Alec!"

"No, no, ten of course—of course ten! . . . Dear old Bill . . . ten children in twelve years. . . . I don't know whether to be more, or less, concerned over what you may, or may not know about marriage. . . . Jenny, do you really mean to start right in having babies?"

"I certainly do!"

Again Uncle Alec looked over the lake.

"I wish you had your mother."

Jenny's eyes filled with tears. "I never wanted her so much as since the night Billy kissed me. A girl just ought to have a mother when she's going to be married! It's so—different, not having a mother then!"

Uncle Alec took the pipe out of his mouth and turned to Jenny. "Jenny Joslin, I'd give everything I possess if you wouldn't get married so soon."

"Why, Uncle Alec—why?"

"To think of you, just twenty, starting in to have a family, tying yourself down to housework and cooking and scrubbing and mending. How much money has your Billy?"

"None at all."

"So— None at all. . . . Jenny, it *can't* be! A man has no right to marry a woman when he has no money, no right on earth—especially not at twenty-one. A few years of waiting then can't make such a difference. How do you know the very first baby won't wreck your health?"

You have no money even to get a home started. Good God, if only I could help you! I'm just no hand at all to earn anything—but all I have is yours. Only wait a year or so, Jenny. Have a little nest egg stored away against a rainy day. Get some more fun and play out of life before you start in having babies on no money."

"You don't understand! Why, Uncle Alec, there'd be no fun in anything, not married to Billy."

"And it might just be—such things have been known to happen—that with no money and babies, there'd be no fun any more in anything, married to Billy."

"If I were married to Billy, everything would be fun!"

Uncle Alec turned back to the lake again and again puffed his pipe.

"There's just one more point, Jenny. It would break your mother's heart not to have you finish college. It was the one thing she was determined on. She married your father so young—she never had a chance to do any of the things she really wanted to do in the world. Over and over she used to say to me, 'Jenny must have four years of college! Must have the foundation of it, the training of it' . . . and always pretty wistfully she'd add, 'must have the fun of it.'"

"Really, Uncle Alec, really did mother want me to graduate?"

"Very much she wanted it."

". . . I've tried so hard always to do what mother would want me to. . . ."

Again the tears in Jenny's eyes.

Again a long silence.

Again broken by Uncle Alec. "I say, Jen, would you care if I ran over and had a talk with your Billy? He's to be my own nephew—the better acquainted he and I get, the more pleased I'll be. I don't want to give you away to a semi-stranger."

"I'd love it. I'd love to have you and Billy chums!"

As they neared the house where Jenny lived her college days, Uncle Alec looked as if there was still something he wanted very much to say.

"There's something on your mind." Jenny wanted his face to look boyish and quizzical and happy again.

"Yes, one last thing. . . . I'm not at all sure yet that you know all you ought to know. I just can't tell you . . . I can't see where to begin . . . I don't . . . I can't. . . . No, sir, it's beyond me. 'Way beyond me. I wish you'd promise me one thing. Before you get married I wish you'd go over and have a talk with . . . Mrs. Rawlins—Cynthia Rawlins. She'd be the most splendid person in all the world for you to have a talk with. I'll write her a little note, so she'll understand, and it will be easy for you. Will you promise?"

"Why Mrs. Rawlins? I don't know her so very well. She visited us that time when I was awfully young, and then when she came to live near by, we hardly ever saw her. . . . She came to see mother once, I remember, not long before mother died. She stayed all afternoon, and she cried, and mother cried, and they seemed to hate to say good-by to each other. After she left mother said—I've never forgotten it—'Jenny, Jenny, if each of us could just be sure we had a chance to live our lives over! Then

we could manage to get through the terrible mistakes of this one more patiently.' Odd, wasn't it? Mrs. Rawlins started to be lovely to me after mother died, but of course Aunt Emie tried to spoil it all. I'm very fond of Mrs. Rawlins—if she wouldn't think it queer, my coming like that. . . . I don't know. . . . Why Mrs. Rawlins?"

"Because Mrs. Rawlins is the loveliest woman in all the world, and could talk to you about marriage, or anything else, as no other woman on earth could. Promise, Jenny?"

Jenny gave her Uncle Alec a look out of the corner of her eye. Since last Wednesday Jenny was very sure she understood very much more about the universe than she had ever understood before.

"I promise," said Jenny obediently.

Uncle Alec felt the weight of the world lifted off his shoulders. Cynthia Rawlins,—Cynthia Rawlins would be able to explain anything and everything. . . . Little motherless Jenny—she would be taken care of!

CHAPTER IV

I

PART of the richness of life is that, whether history repeats itself or not, no single human experience does. Some peculiarity there is to every separate happening which precludes the possibility of ever experiencing exactly the same sensations twice.

When it comes to an event like graduating from college, of course there is nothing else in the span of a single life which even remotely approaches it. How many times in those last delirious ten days did Jenny raise her eyes and throw that heavenward kiss with its "Thank You, God!" How *could* one world hold so much joy? The farewell lunches and teas and dinners and dances, the banquets and speeches, the tears, the rejoicings. The sacred ecstasy of the last formal exercises. Forgotten all the boredom surrounding the Fall of Rome, the Extermination of the Peach Tree Borer. Remembered only that four years, filled to overflowing with the good glad things of life, were drawing to their end,—were, indeed, all but ended. The meetings, the committees, the dances, the sports, the plays serious and frivolous, the bazaars, the games where one cheered and sang till one's throat could cheer and sing no more, the picnics, the initiations, the rallies, and the friends, the friends, the friends!

Yes, and History 38 had been really wonderful, and

English 1a and 14b,—she did love Professor Selby. And anyway, she had gotten through every course, albeit there was no jot of glory to spare. Even that terrible paper on the Cotton Trade in South America 1800-1850 was done and handed in. . . .

And there, to the right of the big hall in Dudley, sat Billy, her Billy. To have had those four glorious, throbbing years and besides, her Billy! “Thank You, oh, *thank* You, God!”

Billy already knew what it meant when she looked at him and then put a finger to her lips and blew a kiss to heaven. She told him, when he once asked, that it made her heart a little lighter. That sometimes she felt so very grateful, so very happy, she just *had* to say, “Thank You; oh, thank You!” to some one, so she blew that little kiss to heaven and said, “Thank You, God!” When she did that just after looking at him, it meant “Thank You for Billy Lamar!”

After the graduating exercises came the Senior girls’ luncheon, where every soul who had a toast to respond to wept, including the heavy and efficient Anabelle Browne. Why shouldn’t Anabelle Browne weep? When, oh, when would she see Jenny Joslin again? Anabelle Browne was not the only one to weep because of Jenny Joslin. . . . Six girls announced their engagements and everybody wept some more and laughed and laughed, and wept and sang songs. Could it really be the end?

The end, all but the very end, which was the reception at President McKenzie’s house, bless his dear old tottering heart! Death was mercifully to call him before another

commencement,—before he had to stand back ever and himself be forced to view a “good business executive.” Old executives are indeed pathetic, often ruinous, figures. Only some old executives, students know, stay forever young. . . . Boards of Regents have many things to take into consideration.

That night, as a last solemnity, Jenny wanted to sit again under their maple at Parson’s Cove. Alas, or not alas, for why should it not be thus at twenty-two?—that maple and every other maple seemed to be taken in last solemnity by souls either beginning or in some luckless cases ending, at least for that particular affair, the eternal call of youth to youth.

Is it such a reprehensible thing to be in love at twenty-two that one must therefore doom coeducation?

Girls in women’s colleges, boys in men’s colleges, have been known to be in love at twenty-two. Usually on a more slender foundation than after four years of seeing just how well or ill the other deports her—or himself in History or Biology, French or Mathematics, in football practice or on the hockey team, in the editorial room or at committee meetings or at rallies,—in the countless details of association of human being with human being in those more than a thousand days.

So Jenny and her Billy walked ’way to the end of the lake, and up beyond the falls, and sat down with their backs against the rocks of Old Forty. Billy’s arm was around her, Jenny’s head close to his.

“I’m so proud of you, Jenny,—so proud! Think, just think, of all you’ve done!”

"Hush, Billy. I almost flunked every year."

"But all you *did*, Jenny! I'm so proud."

"Hush. . . . Just love me. . . ."

Was there such a place in the world as a university?

"Billy, it was better to wait, wasn't it?"

"Everything you decide is always right, Jenny."

"But you really think it was right, anyhow, don't you?"

He thought it was right anyhow. Mainly because he could not help but realize that it had taken him two whole years to reach one hundred and twenty-five dollars a month and save four hundred dollars. Uncle Alec after all was a good scout.

"And now, Billy, there's just a last month to live through!"

2

Waiting for her at home was a note from Uncle Alec:

"I've written to Cynthia Rawlins. Don't forget your promise!"

Also was waiting for her a note from Cynthia Rawlins.

"DEAR JENNY JOSLIN:—

"Do come and have a cup of tea with me in the garden Friday afternoon. You promised your Uncle Alec, and, anyway, I would so love to see you—"

Mrs. Rawlins was very lovely,—a good deal like Jenny's mother. Indeed Jenny felt her whole heart rush out to her, as they sat under the wistaria arbor that warm summer afternoon. A woman to talk to,—a woman who understood her language!

They looked at each other with expressions of complete ease and friendship. Cynthia Rawlins was as grateful for the fact that at last this young thing she loved was coming into her life as Jenny, to think that at last she had found an older woman who was all her soul could ask for. One person like that was as much as a body needed in the world. And Billy. And Uncle Alec.

"You do make me think so of your Uncle Alec!"

Jenny beamed. "And mother—don't I remind you a little of mother?"

"You remind me a little, perhaps, of every person I ever loved. . . . Tell me about your William."

Which was easily done. There was no subject Jenny liked to talk about more than—or as much as—her William.

". . . And you are to be married in a month!"

"Twenty-eight days now!"

"Your Uncle Alec wrote that I was 'to talk to you.' What in the world did he want me to talk to you about, except anything and everything which came into our thoughts?"

Jenny's mind flew back to the afternoon of her Sophomore year by the lake.

"He wants you to talk to me about getting married. I don't know just what. He seemed to think there must be things I ought to know. I'd always thought mother had told me everything necessary."

"What *do* you know?" Cynthia Rawlins asked her.

Jenny told her all she could think of about having babies.

"But there is more to married life, my dearest Jenny,

than having babies. Here I am, married fifteen years, and I've never had any babies. What about that?"

"I don't understand about that," said Jenny. "Did you want babies?"

"With all my heart. It was the—the main reason—I got married."

"Is that so?" asked Jenny in amazement. She wanted babies badly enough, but the main reason she was getting married was to live with Billy Lamar. "Then why didn't you have babies?"

"No one seems to know."

A pause in which Jenny's heart hurt her terribly,—hurt for Mrs. Rawlins. Imagine wanting babies and not having them. . . .

. . . One way and another there was this and that which Cynthia Rawlins could tell Jenny. She told it as Uncle Alec knew she would,—so that when Jenny left the rose-scented garden long after the bees and butterflies were gone, she knew that, while marriage was a good deal more complicated than she had imagined it, there were even more possibilities for beauty and depth of love than she had visioned.

Cynthia Rawlins had not failed Uncle Alec.

Jenny could not know that the woman with the soft brown hair, slight streaks of gray here and there, her eyes gazing off beyond the hollyhocks and cosmos into the land of cherished dreams, was painting the picture of married life for Jenny not as she had learned its beauty from experience,—far from it. Rather, for two hours, did she let her heart play madly with the golden fancy of what

it must have been like had Cynthia Norris waited and married Alec Anderson.

3

Uncle Alec appeared the day before the wedding, "as if," blustered the harassed Aunt Emie, "there wasn't enough to do without having a man around the house!" To add to Aunt Emie's concern and dismay, Mrs. Rawlins insisted on helping. "Don't you pay the least attention to Aunt Emie," Jenny had admonished her. So she did not pay the least attention to Aunt Emie, and packed, and put wedding presents around on tables, and decorated, and printed name cards, and arranged for automobiles, and ordered Jenny's bouquet—all the last things which from lack of experience or from fluster, Aunt Emie, or Jenny, or William, were incapable of performing. Uncle Alec,—of course Uncle Alec couldn't be expected to know anything about anything. ("Why such a lot of fuss, Cynthia? As long as the minister and Billy appear, I can't for the life of me see the sense of all this activity. I came to have a last quiet visit with Jenny.") As for Jenny, efficient Jenny, who had as good as run the entire college before she was through—Jenny went off in a blue-yellow-rose-green haze with Billy at 9:30 a. m. after extra name cards and appeared again at four. We draw the curtain on Aunt Emie's reception to the returned lovers. They failed to catch more than a tenth of it anyway.

Whereupon, realizing that Aunt Emie was in that mood where Jenny preferred company, and Billy having torn

himself away to—to shave or—or do something, Jenny asked where her Uncle Alec was.

“Don’t ask me where your Uncle Alec is!”

“Where’s Mrs. Rawlins?”

“How should I know where Mrs. Rawlins is?” And as Aunt Emie went about moving everything one-sixteenth of an inch right or left from where everything was doing perfectly well in the first place, she sputtered, “Nice way to do, at their age! Go off like that, and she a married woman!”

By special invitation it was Mrs. Rawlins who hooked Jenny’s wedding dress, arranged the veil, patted her here and there. It was only because Jenny was the pet she was of the gods that she looked like a presentable bride when she got through. Mrs. Rawlins’ cheeks were flaming red, her eyes sparkling almost feverishly, her hands shook so that nothing went exactly right. Jenny’s own cheeks were almost as red, her eyes almost as sparkling, her hands shook almost as hard. For Jenny, she was about to step into the Beautiful Existence,—years of glory and wonder and delight with the man she loved. For Cynthia Rawlins, she had snatched one afternoon, she was snatching part of one night, from the eternity of afternoons, and of nights of unending boredom and pettiness,—that much of glory and wonder and delight with the man she loved. One afternoon and part of one night—so much of the Beautiful Existence. So much of a wild surrender to the throbbing pulse of youth and yearning fairly bursting her veins. So much—out of all eternity.

Ah, Jenny, your glowing new life, opening out shimmering before those sparkling eyes, the world bearing gifts, music, rose petals, song. Well may your cheeks glow, your heart beat high!

Ah, Cynthia Rawlins, your one radiant afternoon and night, and the world mocking you for that—if the world ever knows!

Is it worth what the world may do about it, if the world ever does find out?

Yes, cries the soul of Cynthia Rawlins, it is worth anything, everything,—one afternoon and part of one night!

At forty-five one afternoon and part of one night can mean almost as much as one year at twenty-two.

And in the excitement of the wedding of Jenny Joslin to William Lamar, Jenny Joslin, loved of all the town, it just so happened that for once the world forgot to busy itself, as is its wont, with where every one spends every five minutes.

Which, however, was no part of the reason why Cynthia Rawlins, out alone under the wistaria arbor the day after Jenny Joslin's wedding, gazing off again beyond the hollyhocks and cosmos into the land of cherished dreams, whispered to herself, "Thank You, God!"

CHAPTER V

I

"WE shall," Jenny had announced some time in advance, "spend very little on a honeymoon."

"But, Jen," her Billy pleaded, "every one will think I'm a 'cheap skate'—not to give my bride a decent honeymoon! I say, let's economize on something else!"

"We'll start economizing on the honeymoon. Because—look here, Billy,—it's just a matter of cold common sense. How much do you love me?"

"I say, Jen,—good Lord, you don't expect me to be able to tell that!"

"Just so. And I love you the exact same amount in return. Now when two folks love each other that much, will you tell me what earthly difference it makes where they spend their honeymoon!"

"But, Jen, what'll folks say?"

"*Billy!*"

After smoothing over in the traditional way of lovers what came thus perilously near being a disagreement Billy said, "Just what *is* your idea then of a honeymoon?"

"It's this way. You've admitted it doesn't make the least difference where we go or are. Honeymoons—their destination—should of course always be kept secret from every one. That you will admit. Why not keep it secret from ourselves?"

"How in the world can you go some place and not know where you are going?"

To which Jenny replied, with wisdom beyond her years: "That's the way almost everybody goes . . . You never heard a little song, 'I don't know where I'm going, but I'm on my way'?"

"Yes, but a honeymoon!"

"That's what we'll sing when we start off, Mr. and Mrs. William Lamar, decorated in white ribbons and new patent leather shoes,—one, two, three: 'We don't know where we're going, but we're on our way!' . . . Don't look like that, as if I talked—or sang—in Greek. See, Billy, what a mistake it would be to spend a lot of money traveling some place far. We shan't have the remotest notion where we are anyhow. So my idea is, we'll each put down a dollar on the railroad station counter—or you put down two—and say, 'We want that much worth of tickets, southern direction.'"

"Jenny! They'll think matrimony has unsettled your mind!"

"It will do them good—break into their everyday routine. They'll have to get out a book or something and look to see just where one gets to, starting south on a dollar. . . . It may be we'd get four cents back, since the train wouldn't necessarily stop at the exact dollar inch, as it were. We'd get off at the nearest station this side of a dollar's worth,—nothing more!"

"But I'd feel like an idiot!"

"Then I'll buy the tickets. I think it would be no end of fun and excitement."

"We might land in some dirty old coal-mining town—"

"Or some terrible big city—"

"Or—or a place where there'd be nothing but saloons—"

"Or where there'd be no hotel and we'd have to sleep with the station master on a wooden bench and hear the telegraph thing clicking all night—"

"Really, Jen, no joking,—it's an awful risk. And on a honeymoon! It just isn't done!"

"I tell you, Billy, we'll compromise. That's what we'll always do, eh, Billy? The first night, because it would be dark and hard finding our way about a strange—coal-mining town, we'll spend at Forster's over the bridge, where every bride and groom goes year in year out. Conventional, proper, approved. See how good I am, how yielding. And then the next day we'll start out for our dollar's worth."

"Just as you say, Jenny, just as you say."

No two honeymoons in all the world could ever be alike, even if different pairs of brides and grooms went to the same hotel, in the same town, and stayed the same length of time, and had the same weather. On the average, every young couple bring to their first days together twenty to thirty years of background, each quite unlike the other, if for no additional reason than that one is a man, the other a woman. Always a certain separation of personalities continues, the degree of separateness depending on the age of marriage, the mutual interests, the amount of love. For those first days there has been no time to learn a working philosophy of married life, no understanding of the enormous rôle pure technique can play in en-

abling two separate personalities to live comfortably under one roof. And so much depends on those first days! Perhaps the melody and rhythm of the rest of life catches its motif, its impulse, from the honeymoon. When the world they have more or less forgotten claims the two again after those first experiences together, it may receive them back less of lovers than when they stood, that night of nights, and heard themselves pronounced man and wife. Alas, that so much the world could do to play its part toward combining successfully two lives, never gets done, or gets done wrong. Either the mind, soul, and body receive no preparation whatever for the most potential of all steps taken in life, or such equipment as the world supplies is fashioned of ugly stories, half truths, direct lies, innuendoes. Years of falsehoods, of misinformation, of no information at all,—such, for alas how many, is the foundation of the structure upon which society itself rests. For in what consideration,—racial, industrial, political, religious, can the family be disregarded? In every circle it is the starting point, the end. In its intangible atmosphere each new generation receives its impetus, its chains. *People*,—the throbbing dynamic cause and effect of every atom of the world's endeavor!

And how often do we conceive them in an agony of misunderstanding, bear them in a spirit of rebellion, give birth to them in a torment of fear, and let them grow in their turn through lies, misinformation, no information, to the act of conception again!

When it can all be so amazingly wonderful. . . .

But with the first of wedded life, as with the middle

and the end, it rests on two people together to make it wonderful. Bride alone, wife alone, mother alone, no more than groom alone, husband alone, father alone, can produce the soul which typifies marriage. The union of the wills of man and woman is as essential to the creation of the rich spirit of married life as is their physical union necessary for the creation of human beings. Either mate alone, in either case, is sterile.

Of all the wedding gifts to start Jenny Joslin on her life with William Lamar, the most precious of all, then, was the beauty and truth she had learned early from her mother; the beauty and truth she learned later from Cynthia Rawlins. Well might those who loved Jenny, those who sent their cherished thoughts to follow after her, have called "Thank You, God!"

2

It was before ten o'clock the next morning that Jenny and her Billy, Mr. and Mrs. William Lamar, found their way to the ticket window at the railroad station. For all Jenny's fine talk, she discovered it was going to be a much more embarrassing performance than she had imagined to put a dollar down on the counter, or furnish William with sufficient moral support to put two dollars down, and say, "That far, south." But one couldn't start one's married life backing out of things. It was finally she who took the two dollars, Billy pleading the last minute to be

allowed to do something prosaic and conventional, and demanded their money's worth in mileage. The ticket man was anything but helpful. It was too much of a departure from his routine. He was used to haziness, but absolute blankness was out of his line. At last he produced two ordinary day-coach tickets to Smedly, price ninety-five cents each.

Jenny was by that time feeling at ease and assured. She dashed for Billy. "Only think,—we're going some place you never heard of in all your life!"

"If only God has heard of it!" sighed her William. Himself—no, he had never heard of Smedly.

"And we've lived in these parts all our lives!" grinned Jenny, assured that after all the plan was worth the first embarrassment.

They made their way to the last seat in the car. "Billy, isn't it fun, now *isn't* it, not to have any idea where you're going? Oh, I wouldn't give this scheme up for a thousand dollars!"

"It's all very well for you to talk, Jenny. I've got all the responsibility on my shoulders, and it scares me to think I may be taking my—my wife—to some heck of a town."

"Nonsense, it's not your responsibility at all. I'm entirely to blame, absolutely and alone, for what Smedly turns out to be. But you will be a gentleman and say 'Thank you, Jenny,' if it turns out to be very nice, won't you? It will be the test of your manhood, William Lamar, how many times you say 'I told you so!'"

They didn't believe ninety-five cents' worth was far enough to take off their things and make themselves at home. Better be ready to jump at Smedly.

The conductor came along and took their tickets.

"Flag station."

"Good Lord, Jenny!"

"My only fear was that it would turn out to be a bustling city. . . . But it is good we didn't try arriving last night."

In the midst of nothingness the train suddenly stopped. Accident? Cow on the track? The conductor stuck his head in the car door and called:

"SMEDLY."

"I'll be darned!" said the groom.

A grab for suitcases and umbrellas and the kodak; a walk up the entire length of a bewildered and interested car; and Mr. and Mrs. William Lamar stepped out upon a world which presented them with a departing train and a large sign painted "Smedly."

"I'll be darned!" said the groom again.

"Billy, Billy, isn't it glorious and comforting to think women know so much more than men?"

"About what?"

"Honeymoons!"

"How so?"

"Think—we could have spent ninety-five dollars apiece in carfare and not have reached a place where we could have such privacy. You can kiss me in broad daylight, and at the station!—any place!—and no one to giggle and say, 'Bride and groom!' Just try it, Billy."

He tried it—tried it often. Smedly? Atlantic City? No, it really made no difference.

Until he looked around again at an expanse of low rolling hills and brush and scrub oaks, and was overwhelmed with the responsibility of a wife in such a spot.

“But it is *my* responsibility! And I’ve not so much as begun to regret it! . . . See, adventure never ends! Do we take this road east or west, or that road north or south?”

“Whatever you say.”

“No, sir, you’ve got to share a bit in this performance. I can always hurl it at your head that it was the road we took and not Smedly itself.”

“So . . . I wish you’d say, Jenny!”

“No, sir, it’s your honeymoon!”

“Well, then, east, toward those hills.”

Sometimes they trudged along the road with the suitcases; sometimes they sat under the oaks and forgot again whether it was Smedly or Atlantic City. And then they took up the baggage again and went on.

“No one ever *will* know where we spent our honeymoon!” declared Jenny. “When they ask us, we’ll say ‘Smedly,’ and when they say, ‘Where in the world, what in the world is Smedly?’ we’ll just say, ‘Why, Smedly!’”

The sound of a wagon wheel scraping over a rock, the crack of a whip.

“Billy, don’t you love it? Isn’t it exciting?”

Around a low hill a large empty farm wagon came lumbering. On the seat was a weathered, lean man of some

forty years. He drew up his horses at sight of the two strangers and their baggage.

"Hello!" called Jenny.

"Hello," grunted the man.

"Where are we going?" asked Jenny.

"Hunggh?"

"Where are we going?"

"Damned if I know!"

"Same here!" Jenny laughed at him.

"I say"—William felt his manhood must assert itself in some sort of protection for this woman who belonged to him—"I say, is there a hotel or anything any place around here?"

"Huh! . . . Na!" The man wiped one side of his nose with the thumb of the hand which held the whip. "Hotel? . . . Huh. . . . Na. . . ."

"What *is* there around here?" What a honeymoon to take a girl on!

"Nothin' much."

"Well, *you* live *some place!*" Jenny ventured.

"Sure, I live *some place.*"

"Well, maybe there's *some place else!*" Jenny suggested happily.

". . . Gonna settle?"

"No, not settle—long. We're—we're on our honeymoon!"

"Wall I never. . . . Ho-ho! Wall I never. . . . Ya mean ya jus' got married?"

"Mean that."

"Say, whatever . . . Wall, I'll be durned!"

"We're going to stay a week,—that's about all the vacation my—Mr.—a—Billy—could get."

The man rubbed his nose again.

"Well, I ain't so old I forgot all I ever knew. Won't do for you chilluns to honeymoon out a whole week under scrub oaks. . . . Starve to death. . . . Great business, this lovin' and all. . . . Gotta eat. . . . Gotta eat. . . . So . . . I'll be durned. . . . Well, you're here. . . . Either ya can get in and I'll drive ya to St. George,—that's quite a place—movies every night, railroad, hotel, stores and all, or . . . Want a lot a company?"

"Goodness no, none at all!"

"Uh-ha. . . . So . . . I'll be durned. . . . Smedly. . . . Wall, or ya ken have my house. Ain't much. I was plannin' to be gone four or five days. Was goin' to ask Smith Tumpson to tend the chickens. . . . Cow died. . . . I ken jus' as well stay away a week. If ya ken feed the chickens. . . . Ya'll find the feed in the barn. Eat one of 'em now and then if ya want. . . . I ain't so old I forgot everythin' I ever knew. . . . No, sir. . . . There's enough food around, I guess. . . . Y'll find some berries an' one thing 'n' another."

"Oh, Mr.—Mr.—"

"No 'Mister,'—jus' plain Muller."

"Honestly, Mr.—I've just got to say Mr. Muller,—you're just too good for words! Billy, Billy,—didn't I just know it would work out like this!"

"Wall, what'll it be?"

"Oh, your house,—don't you say so, Billy?"

"Sure I do. . . . I say, you're kind!"

"Huh,—ya ain't seen the house yet. . . . Ya get happy awful easy. . . . I'll be durned. . . . So, go along . . . make yourselves ta home. . . Long time since I had anything to do with weddin's an' things. Makes me feel all young again. . . . I'll be durned. . . . It's about two mile on. . . . S'long. Enjoy yaselves! Wish it was all fixed up nice an' all. . . . I declare. . . . Makes me feel all young again. . . ."

"I say"—Jenny was in that state where she could scarcely wait to blow her kiss to heaven—"I say, you're the very nicest man we've seen since we've been married! Just think how we'll talk about you and bless you for years and years and years!"

"Huh. . . . Mebbe. . . . Mebbe not. . . . Wall, s'long. . . ."

"Have a grand time at St. George!"

"Huh. . . . St. George. . . . Wall, have a gran' time at Smedly!"

He jerked in the reins, grunted to his horses, and turned his head exactly in time to catch the kiss Jenny threw to him just after the one to heaven. "Don't forget the chickens!" he called.

Around the bend behind the hill which hid Mr. Muller from view Jenny tugged the suitcases from Billy's hands and set them plump in the middle of the road. Then she stood square in front of him, threw both her arms about his startled neck, whereupon his hat landed in the dust, and giving him a kiss which nearly dislocated his face, said, "Did you ever, ever know any one in all the world as lucky as Mr. and Mrs. William Lamar!"

Billy pulled himself together again, held her at arm's length and looked her straight in the eyes. "You, Jenny, —I never knew any one in the world so lucky as Mr. William Lamar!"

Which was nice, and pleased his wife very much.

They trudged along through the dust and the sun, and never minded dust or sun. Jenny gurgled and laughed, and they sang songs, and Billy was almost as happy as if it had all been his idea.

"But of course, Jenny, we really haven't seen the house yet. It may be something awful!"

"But it's a house! And we've got it to ourselves! And there are chickens and berries!"

And all of a sudden, around another little turn in the road following a hill, they came upon it. It was very, very small, it was unpainted, it had a little dirty window toward the road, next the door. Billy looked at Jenny, Jenny looked at Billy, and they laughed.

"Jenny, honest though, it is an awful looking place to take a bride."

"Billy! It's our first home. Think of the wide range in improvement it allows for in the second home you prepare for your bride! We shall have such a feeling of increased material prosperity every move we ever make!"

They walked up a little path with a border of old bottles turned upside down. On either side of the border was a scraggly mixture of cabbages, marigolds, turnips, carrots, fuchsias, onions, sweet peas. To the left of the house was a potato patch. To the right, the chickens. The door

was unlocked; they stepped wide-open eyed into the house. It possessed just one room. A stove was in one corner, a bed in another, a table in another, a curtained shelf arrangement in the fourth and last.

“No nook for you to escape from me, William!”

“Jenny, honest though, it is a queer-looking place to bring a bride.”

“Nonsense,—it’s Smedly! It’s where you live when you live in Smedly. And the first thing of all is, you wash the window while I see about food.”

If folks aren’t too particular they can always find everything they want in the world. The great mistake is that too many people are too fastidious.

Within an hour Jenny had fed her man,—there were canned goods of sorts aplenty. The window was washed. The bedding was out getting more sun than it knew what to do with, and Jenny was washing two old red and white tablecloths she found to do for sheets. They scrubbed, they swept, they dusted. Bottles and tin cans were filled with sweet peas and placed in every conceivable corner. There is small satisfaction in cleaning a place already practically clean. There is complete contentment of the soul in bringing spotless order out of a ten-year collection of dust and dirt. The lamp chimney had never been washed since it was bought, the stove never polished, the shelves never scrubbed. By seven o’clock Mr. Muller’s bachelor quarters fairly blistered with cleanliness, everything smelt of sun and sweet peas, and Mr. and Mrs. William Lamar were eating their supper under the oak trees between the potato patch and the house.

"Were you ever in all the world so happy?"

"I was never in all the world so happy."

"Now where is Jenny's good William, who says all gentlemanly-like, 'Thank you, Mrs. Lamar, for Smedly!'"

"Thank you, Mrs. Lamar, for Smedly!" And he didn't have to move to kiss her the seven hundred and fifty-third time that day.

Later, on the doorstep of the home they already loved, they watched the moon rise all for them, full, round, yellow, over the low scrub-oak hills.

"Our moon, Billy, our home, our—World!"

And then a forlorn cock crow on the still night air.

"Oh, oh,—and our chickens, William! We forgot all about our chickens!"

Seven days of contentment. On Saturday they found a stream, and after four hours of effort caught two trout with their hands,—two trout, all of four inches long. Sunday they forgot the chickens again and got up with a candle in the middle of the night to find the feed in the barn. Only the chickens refused to come out at that hour and partake of a moonlight supper. Monday they put up a lunch of bacon between cold hot cakes and walked for miles over rolling scrub-oak and low-brush hills. They waded in brooks, they slept under trees, they read some poems of Service's. Tuesday they cleaned the barn, after deciding Saturday they wouldn't, Sunday they'd better not, Monday it really wasn't their barn, and they ought to leave it alone. Wednesday they dammed the creek and

experimented with swimming in a foot of water and drying in the sun. "Why, oh, why didn't we think of this Saturday, and every day since?" Thursday they cleaned the house all over again and raked the garden and trained up the sweet peas against the house which had till then grown all in a heap, and hoed perilously among the vegetables, and washed the window again, and spruced up generally, inside and out, that Mr. Muller might stand spellbound at his own gate. All the time Jenny was almost in tears to think that the next day was their last.

Nor was it until that last night they realized they had no idea about trains. They must just arrive early at that sign marked Smedly, and wave. Perhaps only one train a day ran north. Perhaps it would not reach that sign until six-thirty p. m. Perhaps it reached it at nine a. m. So they made another lunch of bacon between cold hot cakes and filled an empty bottle with water from the well, and were ready for an early start.

The last morning of their honeymoon. . . . They hung over every moment of it,—the last time we get breakfast on our beloved stove; the last time we eat under our beloved scrub oaks (we mustn't forget to put the table back in the house); the last time we wash our beloved dishes. At the door they kissed each other as those kiss who are about to return to the world more lovers than they left it, kissed each other again on the step—and lo, there at the gate was Mr. Muller's wagon, Mr. Muller himself and—a strange woman next him.

Mr. Muller was one beam from ear to ear. "Ain't it a nice little home, though?" he was asking the lady. "Ain't

them nice sweet peas I fixed that way by the door? I do declare, it all looks even nicer'n I thought it would!"

Then he noticed Mr. and Mrs. William Lamar.

"Ho-ho! There we are! How's Smedly? Old Muller's house ain't so bad, eh? . . . I'll be durned. . . ."

He jumped down off the wagon, now piled high with provisions of all sorts, then turned and helped heave the stolid, healthy-looking party to the ground.

"Well, I do declare. . . . Guess I surprised you all right. . . . Ya never spected me to be turning up here with a Mrs. Henery Muller, I'll bet my bottom dollar. Bet ya ain't half so surprised as I am! How 'bout yaself, Mrs. Muller,—hey? Little surprised yaself, I'll jus' bet my bottom dollar. . . . I say, I don't jus' recollect as I got ya names. Meet m' wife!"

All the world loves lovers. Jenny, bride of twenty-two, found herself embracing Mrs. Muller, bride of forty-five, and Mrs. Muller found herself planting large kisses on Jenny's joyous face.

"Oh, I'm *so* glad, *dear* Mrs. Muller! I'm *so* glad!"

Jenny's neat traveling hat was all askew. Mrs. Muller's St. George Emporium creation of lavender straw and red roses was all askew. Billy and Mr. Muller were shaking hands and patting each other on the back. Wasn't it a wondrous world?

"I jus' declare," old Muller sputtered, the most excited of all. "Blame if I didn't get thinkin' all the way to St. George. . . . I got thinkin', you ain't so old, Muller, old boy! What's the matter with ya jus' having a little honeymoon at Smedly of ya own? says I, and the more

I says it the younger I felt, and I sez, sez I, a gal round old Muller's house 'u'd look purty good to me. . . . Gosh . . . felt just about eighteen, blame if I didn't. . . . An' I looked around St. George an' couldn't see nobody looked like jus' what I was after. Lost four whole days. So I put an ad in the St. George *Mercury*, an' blame if I didn't draw the missus here—jus' *ex-actly* what I was lookin' for!"

He thumped her gaily on the back, and her face broke into a contented beam under the St. George Emporium's lavender straw and roses, still askew.

"An' so here we are! Purty nice old home—eh, Missus Muller?"

"It's awful nice!" Mrs. Muller murmured, still one large smile. Everything about Mrs. Muller, from the roses of St. George's Emporium, to the shoes of St. George's Casino Shoe Parlor, was large.

"No, siree!—couldn't let ya fellas hog all the honeymoonin'!"

Billy began to feel a bit uneasy. Suddenly he realized that he and Jenny had never given a thought to some manner of payment for their week of joy,—bed and board at the expense of Mr. Muller. Painfully he began:

"A—Mr. Muller, we—we owe you a whole lot for this last week. We've eaten up almost all your canned goods. We didn't kill any of the chickens, though,—Jenny just wouldn't have it when it came right down to it,—but we—we owe you a whole lot . . .!"

"Hey there,—yor off on the wrong foot. Good Lord, young fella, ya don't owe me nothin'! Look here what I got, all 'n account of ya and yor little gal!" And again

the sturdy Mrs. Muller shook contentedly from his thump.

So Jenny and William stood there and tried to thank the man as well as mortals can express gratitude for the most glorious days they had ever known. Jenny kissed Mrs. Muller again and they looked at each other. In even the calm eyes of the sturdy bride of forty-five there were tears. Some happiness in the world is just too much. Jenny was visibly snuffling. She turned to bid Mr. Muller good-by, and because at last all words failed her, she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him too.

“Hey there. . . . I declare. . . . Wall, I’ll be durned, blame if I won’t! I say, everything does sure happen at once in this world!”

Jenny and her Billy walked slowly to the bend of the road and looked back. Mr. Muller was unloading the provisions from the wagon, whistling at the top of his lungs. Mrs. Muller,—Jenny clutched William’s arm—Mrs. Muller, already clad in a kitchen apron, singing a Swedish song, was washing—was washing—the window!

CHAPTER VI

I

It was in November that Jenny received a letter from Cynthia Rawlins:

“Child, child, I miss you so, I need you so! That last month we had together spoilt me, having you always to talk to, to work with. It made everything easier with you around. I do believe you took ten years off my age.

“Not till now have I been able to write you,—not until I heard the great news from you. I hesitated to tell you of my happiness until I should hear that you too were looking forward in joy and anticipation to the Wonderful Event. And you hesitating to tell me, knowing how I longed for children.

“Jenny, Jenny, I am going to have a baby of my own! My soul has yearned for one these—I was going to say fifteen years. Nay, these twenty, twenty-five, thirty years,—ever since I can remember. And now, sometimes I wake in fear and trembling. I am so old,—forty-six!—the child, my own child, will think of me as a grandmother. Sometimes—ah, I can tell you this, you buoyant young thing, and it will cause you no concern—but sometimes I wake in the night frightened, terribly frightened, lest having waited this long, perhaps affairs won’t go just right. Perhaps the little thing will not be strong. Perhaps I cannot weather the trial. Such fears I have, such fears! When all my soul should be rejoicing! It is just because of such overwhelming rejoicing that I am so afraid.

“And you, you child yourself, and I, this aged woman who loves you, and leans on you with a hungry heart,—we shall be suffering our pains of glorious possession about

the same time. You will come through so amazingly,—it's your way. I shan't be surprised to hear you get along without a doctor or a nurse, and no doubt you'll be painting the roof when the baby starts to arrive. Do, do let it rest a spell after it is born! I had to read the part of your letter where you told of your doings to the doctor. He takes life most seriously,—perhaps all doctors are like that. When I got through he remarked earnestly, 'How grateful the offspring will be for birth and quiet.'

"And I,—I sit around, scared to move lest something happen. You young thing just starting out, declaring this your first of ten,—well may you hop, skip, and jump about creation. As for me,—ah, Jenny, this is the only chance I shall ever have in life. I wonder if you possibly can love your baby as I shall love mine!

"Heigh-ho! Think of me, joyous Jenny, as you career about the town marketing, scrubbing, cooking, cleaning, eating whipped cream at parties,—think of me sitting almost in a daze by the front upstairs window, sewing, sewing, sewing, on four times as many garments as a child can possibly wear. But when I *do* go out, and I venture forth now and then,—ah, Jenny, I carry my head high! It is worth waiting fifteen years for this.

"I am sending you a box of baby things. As I tell you, I've made four times too many for my own, and it is plain to see you have no time for sewing. I don't imagine Aunt Em is overburdening you. But, Jenny, I ran over one day,—I was so hungry for news of you and thought Aunt Em might have some. No one came to the door so I opened it softly, prepared to call upstairs and ask if any one were home. There was Aunt Em in the Front Parlor—she will call it that—smoothing out a little baby sack she had just finished knitting, and the tears were streaming down her face. I knew she would only feel embarrassed did she have any idea I saw her, so I closed the door softly and went on home.

"Jenny, I knew just exactly how she felt. After I got to my room I wept for her until I thought my heart would break. But you—you married at twenty-two, having your

first baby your first year—you, Jenny, will never in all your life guess the suffering I knew was in your Aunt Em's heart. For you—yes, the world is indeed 'perfect,' as you say. But for some of us—heigh-ho! again—it is far too late to have it anything but a cruel and almost insufferable denial.

"Writing of Emie I felt so keenly again for her I almost forgot the joy that at last is mine; how my tears are—yes, yes, they *must* be—dried. For, oh, I have at last so much, so much! Fifteen years I have been telling myself that a baby meant the most in all the world to me. Therefore indeed would I never forgive myself if I continue sighing after the impossible.

"For a sight of you! A talk with you! Jenny, Jenny, I do love you!"

Two months later Jenny received another letter from Cynthia Rawlins:

"DEAREST JENNY:—

"The worry lest things go wrong is almost torture. I have written you the enclosed letter. If everything turns out smoothly with my blessed babe and me, tear it up. But if—if I should die, read it. I could not ask more of you than I do in that letter. It is from a soul in desperation. If I could have half your courage!

"Faithfully always,

"CYNTHIA R."

2

One month later, and Jenny called to her William one bright Sunday morning: "Now what do you know about that for luck! I swore I'd get this bathroom painted—I *swore* it. And bless me if I don't just know the Child is arriving!"

Billy turned a shade slightly grayer than the bathroom. "Jenny!" he gasped.

"Goodness, Billy, any one would think you were going to have it!"

"I'll—I'll run for the doctor!"

He turned and fled out the front door. Jenny rushed to the living room and put her head out the window.

"I say, Will-i-um! What do you think we have a telephone for?"

Will-i-um tore back.

"Dearest husband, it's always best to hold the telephone book right side up in searching for numbers. That's the common practice in all the first families. . . . I'm so glad you're in such a state,—it makes me feel so calm. . . . If it's really the doctor's number you're after, you pasted it yourself right here on the telephone six months ago."

". . . *Jenny!*" William Lamar's voice sounded as if he had direct communication that creation was to end in five minutes. "*Jenny!*"

"Heavens, Billy, what in the world is it?"

"The—the line's busy!"

"Will-i-um!" Jenny's laughing tone mocked his. "Then I'll just not have the baby!"

"Please let me run for the doctor! I'd be so much more—more comfortable—running!"

"And if the baby arrives before you get back—?"

"My God, Jenny,—you don't really think—"

"Sometimes they arrive right in the street cars, Billy—just like that. In hacks, in taxis,—on street corners—"

"Jenny!"

"But I've arranged, this being my seventh, and so being very experienced, to have mine arrive in bed."

Meanwhile Jenny was endeavoring to raise central while her William leaned limp against the wall. She got the trained nurse. The trained nurse would be right out. No, there was no hurry about the doctor. Three or four hours would be time enough.

"Three or four hours, Jenny! Why—why, I can't *stand* it!"

He had to stand it fourteen hours. For ten hours of that time Jenny kept his spirits up. The last four she needed for herself such energy as she had. Billy sat by the side of the bed and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief and asked the doctor every so often in a hoarse whisper, meant to be inaudible to Jenny, if she were dying. He refused to leave the room, Jenny refused to consider such a move. After a severe struggle, when Jenny did lie back very limp, he gasped, "Now, *now*, she's dying!" And when his agonized gaze beheld Jenny winking one eye at the doctor, he felt he was as abused a husband as ever lived. How could she treat his agony so! And when, shortly before the baby was born, Jenny remarked, and winked this time at him, "William, if you had proposed to me almost any time to-day I don't think I should have accepted you!" his heart hurt unbearably. She also informed the doctor that she felt it a very wise provision of society and providence that as an ordinary established custom babies did not arrive on honeymoons. "It certainly would take the edge off a wedding trip!"

William Lamar had supposed women took childbirth seri-

ously. It was hardly fair for him to do all the suffering!

The last half-hour Jenny could take life lightly no more. When, when had she ever said she intended having twelve children? Even ten, the number she had reduced the family to during the third month, seemed out of all proportion to common sense. The last fifteen minutes, though an only child was apt to be spoilt, she felt that after all one was quite enough for anybody.

"There!" she breathed at last with a tremendous sigh. And because suddenly the world seemed so easy and comfortable and restful, she made a little kiss sound and whispered, "Thank You, God!"

And then she heard William's voice,—the doctor had assured him she was not dead,—William's triumphant, conquering voice calling, "Jenny, Jenny, my darling Jenny,—it's a BOY!"

The twinkle just had to come in Jenny's eye. She put her hand up and patted his cheek. "Thank you for having a boy, William!"

Did not the gods love Jenny? Was she not their pet? Of course it was a boy!

"Thank You, oh, thank You, God!"

Such a little, funny, precious thing to be so hard to get into the world—

"My son!"

Within an hour she and the baby were asleep. The object of her creation, as far as most of the gods were concerned, had been realized. They, too, slept.

Only some of the newer gods stayed awake, gods who

were interested in affairs other than reproduction. Jenny was their pet as well. They had ideas of their own, those young, upright, intelligent gods. Scarce a thousand years old were some of them, and some, indeed were scarce a hundred. They were inexperienced as yet, and muddled things a good bit, since gods and men need more than a hundred or a thousand years to be assured of the Way and the Truth.

Jenny was their pet. They counseled long together. If only the older gods—those gods of hundreds of thousands of years—were not so much more powerful, so much more experienced, so much more entrenched. It had to be admitted that they had done their job remarkably well. It was a splendid child. The mother slept very peacefully. But the job ought to be done well, after hundreds of thousands of years!

3

In the big hospital in the big city Cynthia Rawlins lay very still. She was not asleep. A week before four doctors had labored over her most of thirty-six hours. There was nothing much of Cynthia Rawlins left now,—just a pale weak tired body which somehow slipped and slipped, and could find nothing to catch hold of to pull her back to life.

Dr. Rawlins sat beside the bed. After fifteen years he was the proud father, the deliriously proud father, of a son. Babies after babies had he helped other women during those years to bring into the world. Never a ray of

hope for Cynthia and him. That morning, oh, that morning, when he chided her. "Cynthia, I certainly do not understand why you should be feeling sick. I can see no cause for it whatsoever!" and her face had flushed scarlet as she told him, "Albert, it's—it's a baby!"

He could not believe his ears. After fifteen years! "Cynthia, Cynthia! This is the happiest moment of my life!" It seemed to make over his whole world.

And here she lay, dying. When he needed her most! He could have managed all these years with a housekeeper, somehow, but how could he ever raise a baby without its mother? Why *didn't* his wife contrive to get well?

"It's such a weak little thing, Cynthia. You ought to pull yourself together and take care of it. He'll need you so very much!"

Cynthia just kept on looking at the ceiling. She was too tired. She was much too tired to want to live any longer.

Her baby. . . . If only she weren't so tired. . . .

"Albert . . ."

"Yes, Cynthia."

"There's a letter . . . my top bureau drawer . . . read it. . . ."

"Yes, yes, Cynthia."

"Albert . . ."

"Yes, yes."

"Promise you'll do what it says. . . ."

"Why, Cynthia, you—you couldn't ask me to promise something I know nothing about!"

"Promise!"

It took all Cynthia Rawlins' strength to say it so loud.

"Hush, Cynthia,—I can't!"

"Promise!"

Her eyes were still toward the ceiling, imploring. Slowly she turned her face and looked at her husband. He turned his eyes away and felt his courage falter.

"All right, Cynthia, I promise."

She closed her eyes—to rest—to die.

Albert Rawlins rode back to his own town, went up to Cynthia's room, opened her top bureau drawer and got out a letter addressed to himself. Nothing he had ever done weighed on him like the promise to do what that letter said. It was a terrible thing to ask of a man. The responsibility of his child, hanging between life and death; the loss of his wife,—both relegated themselves to the background of his mind in comparison with the overwhelming burden of carrying out the unknown commands of that letter.

He did not like the idea of reading it in Cynthia's room. His own was no better. He was afraid some one might come in downstairs. It was too cold in the garden. He roamed about the house like a man in a maze—into this door, out that, always clutching the letter. It was a terrible thing to ask of a man. More and more the monstrosity of the demand appealed to him, each door he entered, each door he came out—as something he in no way deserved. Always he had been a kind and just husband, in the face of the fact that, with what he confessed was not conscious stubbornness, his wife had taken fifteen years to bear him a child. Never had he reproached her. And now she had asked him to promise to do things he knew nothing about.

Would a—a kind, a—just—wife have put her husband through such an ordeal? He could never believe it possible.

At last, up in his own room, with the door locked, he sat on the edge of the bed and read the letter.

“DEAR ALBERT:—

“This letter will come to your attention only if I die. I am so beset with tortures lest that is just what will happen to me that I must ease my mind by leaving this word behind.

“First of all, please at once telegraph Jenny Joslin Lamar.”

That was surely not too much to have promised. He clutched at the sentence with an immense feeling of relief. . . .

“You have been—I use the words you especially value—a kind and just husband to me. I would not necessarily pain you. But I love my baby more than I love you, which is what impels me to write. . . .”

Albert Rawlins had always felt women who loved their babies more than their husbands very peculiar. . . . And to say so, right out! . . .

“You are almost fifty years old now, Albert. You are set in your ways. . . . [What a strange last letter!] . . . You have no idea of the care and responsibility of a child always in the house. . . . [Indeed, indeed, he quite felt that as she lay there dying . . .] Young people should have the care of children. I have one great wish for my baby: that Jenny Lamar shall bring him up. . . .”

Dr. Rawlins caught his breath. So that was the promise! Strangers, mere children, to have his baby! What a woman,—to ask that!

“ . . . I know how happy and proud you are at the thought of a child at last. . . . My terrible fear is that you will insist on keeping the baby. Albert, Albert, promise me you will let the Lamars have him,—at least part of the time! Promise! . . . ”

How could she dream of such a thing? It were strange enough had she asked that he let those young Lamars have his child for a visit now and then. . . . He never realized how peculiar Cynthia was. . . . No, no, she had asked too much when he was made to promise that those young Lamars should help bring up his son.

“ . . . Oh, I hope, I hope you never see this letter! I hope I never—I mean that I won’t die until—oh, Albert—until I have had time to love my baby—long!

“Good-by,

“CYNTHIA.”

Not “Your loving wife,” or “Your faithful wife,” or “Your affectionate wife,”—just “Good-by,” that way. Sometimes Cynthia was certainly and decidedly—unconventional. In fact, the whole letter was—unconventional, to say the least. First his wife dies and leaves him with a baby to care for, and then she demands he give up the baby,—the baby he had waited for fifteen years!

His baby—give his baby to the Lamars! What did mere children know about raising a baby? No one on earth had the right to ask a man to promise to give his child to irresponsible—youngsters! It was altogether—irreligious. God himself would never counsel such a thing. God had counseled him, Albert Rawlins, against giving Cynthia his promise to carry out the letter,—he heard God’s

voice. Because he had let sentiment blind him to his duty then, it should not, would not, blind him again. How God must want to smite him for having promised! How mercifully and immediately God would forgive him if he broke that promise!

But he certainly could see to telegraphing Miss Jenny—that is, Mrs. Lamar, about Cynthia. That much of his word God would be quite willing he should keep.

4

Jenny lay like a female animal, contentedly gazing at her cub. Peace was in her soul, less in her body, but that, they told her, was as it should be. Every one prepared you for the pains of childbirth, from the Bible down. Every one always forgot to mention how it felt to come together again. After all, anything so long as you surely came. To appear in public once more in a dress which went in at the waist!

She heard Billy's steps on the porch, the front door open, his call.

"All's well!" she sang out, as she had for almost three hundred nights, as soon as she heard his voice.

He dashed into her room and stood as usual not knowing to whom he should pay attention first. Jenny had told him it made her just a wee bit jealous when the baby got the first kiss, and it hurt her feelings when he failed to notice his son properly until he had done kissing her. Such a difficult rôle as a man with a family had to play.

Billy looked a bit serious this night.

"Get it off your mind at once!" Jenny admonished him.

"How do you know I have anything on my mind?"

"Will-i-um! As if I hadn't lived with you all these many years!"

So he told her that a telegram had come several days ago, but he had worried about giving it to her lest it upset her—or something.

"It's not—nothing's wrong with Cynthia Rawlins?"

"Yes, just that."

"The baby—did the baby die?"

"No—"

"Not Cynthia herself?"

"Yes, Cynthia herself."

Jenny bit her underlip. She could not help it,—the tears ran down her cheeks. "Billy, Billy, she was—she was my second mother, and my sister, and my dear, dear, dearest friend!"

She sobbed softly to herself. Billy felt perfectly miserable, not having the least idea what really to do to comfort a woman in tears. Something had to be done, of course, so he patted the bed and said, "There—there! There—there!"

And then Jenny thought of the letter.

Billy found it in her drawer. She propped herself up in bed and read:

"LOVED JENNY:—

"If ever you read even this far, it will mean that no such person as Cynthia Rawlins exists on earth. How amazing that seems. I sit here aghast at the idea.

"All day I have been shaking, wanting to write this letter to you, longing to talk to you instead. When I

think of what I am going to ask of you—surely more difficult letter was never written.

“I wonder if you ever guessed, that last month we were together, how thin the bond of love was which held Albert and me together. Fifteen years is a long, long time—oh, Jenny, *thousands* of separate days and nights—to live with a man one loved little to begin with. I can’t tell now, for I never did know, just why I did it,—I mean why I married Albert Rawlins. Except that there was that great—perhaps half—of me which wanted children,—yearned, hungered, longed for them. With all the rest of me,—more than all the rest of me—I loved Alec Anderson. And I married Albert Rawlins. Don’t ever ask me *why*. There is no reason under heaven. God punished me. I told myself I married to have children. That is not reason enough, I know now. I had none—and lived out the days—and nights—with the man I grew farther away from every hour. Always I tortured myself with the thought, ‘I married him to have children,—I will have a child!’ Yet ought a child be born where there is no love?

“And yet, and yet—oh, I never have settled it in my mind. What is a woman to do if her whole being longs for a child?

“As the years wore on (don’t mind my rambling along this way; it is helping me, and it isn’t really rambling, as you shall see) I realized more and more that it was not my ‘whole being’ which wanted a child. There were still and always great areas of me which yearned for—Alec Anderson, and what he meant. Passion, love that stirred to the depths. Oh, how I cursed my fate that I had closed the door on all of that!

“Then you came along,—you, with your freshness and your own love. We had one month together. I wrote you once that it took years off my age. Every day being with you, talking of your Billy,—it meant that every wound from the hurt of doing without Alec Anderson seemed to become fairly raw. And over and over, as I left you and walked back here, it was as if a great sign stared me in the face, ‘Too Late!’

"And then your wedding day. Ah, Jenny, you felt yourself no inch more a bride that Thursday than did I. Romance, love, life, raced through my veins,—I had to busy myself every minute to keep my head. And Alec Anderson every minute right there.

"That afternoon we dropped everything, he and I, and walked off into the land of memory and dreams. Fifteen years were as nothing. I forgot all the pain, the emptiness. It was my bridal day—mine and Alec Anderson's.

"I bare my heart that you can understand what I am going to ask of you. There is a terrible sickening heaviness comes over me when I think of dying and leaving a child of mine to be brought up by Albert Rawlins. There is more than the abstract idea of it,—of a man I care for so little having the care of my baby. I can't bear the thought of the influences which would surround the child. His (I keep referring to it as 'he'—oh, do know I shall be every bit as happy if it is a girl!), his little growing soul would be crushed and stifled with precepts and admonitions of an age that is dead and gone. Albert's God is not my God, his State is not my State,—ah, his whole heaven and earth cramp me, make me gasp for breath. Do you know what my nightmare is? That if I die, Albert will get your Aunt Emie to keep house for him and bring up my child. I know it in every inch of me. Jenny!

"Now comes the fearfully hard part,—what I have to ask of you. I want you to bring up my baby! Don't think I haven't a full realization of what the request means—especially with you raising a little family of your own. But, Jenny, I *have* to ask it! Where else can I turn? Not a relative do I possess,—they would all be too old anyhow. Oh, I want him to have youth for his guide and counselor! Rather a thousand times the pliable mistakes of youth than the rigid shackles of the middle-aged! It is so much, so much, to ask of you. How could one ever suggest more? Bring him up as yours, your very own. If he could but catch something of your love of life!

"I've some money of my own—a nest egg that fell my way a few years ago. I am leaving it all to you. It will

carry him along until he is old enough to help look out for himself. Use it in any way whatsoever you see fit. I have such faith in your youth, your courage,—*you*.

“. . . And yet—how in the world can I expect Albert to give up his own child? A cold fear comes over me that nothing could influence him to do such a thing. Sometimes I grow frantic and decide I shall make him promise it on my death bed—if I *do* have to die. Once I wrote him a note about it, but the demand seemed so monstrous I had no courage, no faith, to bring to the task of putting the right words on paper. But I am desperate! I so long with all my heart to have you bring up my child. Because you are you. And because—because you are the adored niece of the finest man I ever knew, the only man I ever loved.

“It comes over me again that if ever you read this letter it means that I am—dead. How can I die, I, who at last am to possess what I have yearned for these countless years! I’ll *not* die!!

“But if I do, Jenny, love my baby.

“Your

“CYNTHIA R.

“Jenny, don’t let them name him after Albert,—please not that!”

CHAPTER VII

I

JENNY lay back on her pillow, a hundred thoughts racing through her brain at once. For one thing she was downright glad Cynthia Rawlins had written about her Uncle Alec, and in a way which took it for granted that Jenny would not take it upon herself to pass judgment. Once she and Cynthia had talked of her mother and Dr. Cairns, and Cynthia had asked her, "What do you think of a married woman who loves some man other than her husband, or a married man who loves some woman other than his wife?"

And Jenny had answered: "For other people I have no moral standards whatever. When it comes to questions of ethics, others can do exactly as they do,—it is absolutely none of my business. With the world so full of things to do and see and think about, why should I bother one minute over what other people are up to? And of all things in the world I shall never make my business, it is, whom, how, when, and where, other people love. . . ." She had thought awhile. "Why, Cynthia Rawlins, *think* of any one else mixing in with people's *loving!* . . . I love just loving so,—I suppose the truth of it is that down in my heart I should always be glad of all there could be of it in the world, 'legal' or 'illegal'—the more the better. There's none too much."

"But, Jenny," Mrs. Rawlins had reminded her, "it can sometimes bring such misery in its wake, this loving, if one gives in."

"So it seems. Misery if you love, misery if you don't love. Happiness through loving, unhappiness through loving. If for no other reason than the complexity of the thing, I shall let others arrive at their own decisions. One thing I know: it will never make the least difference in the world to me what any one else in the world does about it. I have Jenny Joslin to look after,—it may be quite enough."

It interested Cynthia Rawlins where Jenny had acquired her ideas. It needed a bit of thought. Finally Jenny had told her: "I suppose from a talk I once had with Aunt Emie about mother and Dr. Cairns. And then I helped a girl in college once who got into trouble. It made me rebellious. When I saw how almost impossible it was for her to find a single friend to help her, how one and all turned against her, I vowed then that any one I knew, or didn't know, could do anything,—it would make no difference to me. Nobody need fear the universe will take to lax ways because of my attitude. There are sure to be enough people left whose main interest in life will be to sit in judgment on their fellow beings."

So Cynthia Rawlins had taken Jenny at her word. Over and over Jenny blessed her for that.

The fact that she would have the responsibility of another baby,—that thought came trailing some time after numerous others. . . . Another baby. Of course she would bring up Cynthia's baby. . . . A few disquieting considerations

started to work their way to the fore. Jenny's control over disquieting considerations was simple and effective. It always had been. Quietly and swiftly and firmly she shut the door in their faces. Contrary to some psychological precepts, they did not thereby return to haunt her in the night nor cause hysteria nor obsessions nor quirks in her disposition. Probably because they never had the chance fully to form. They seemed to fade and die at the start from lack of air. Perhaps it was Jenny's chief stock in trade. Unpleasant things happen, unpleasant thoughts occur, to everybody. Jenny did not "forget" them in that sinister fashion of the New Psychology. She shut that door of hers on them and they died—just plain died. No single inch of Jenny's system seemed in the least interested enough to keep them in any way, shape, or form, alive. Of course some smart professor might nevertheless assure us they were Somewhere.

To which Jenny would reply, "Let them be there, then. At least it is all very comfortable."

So when she caught herself beginning to think of reasons why it might be somewhat inconvenient having another baby in the family, she whisked all such ideas into that room and closed that door and that was the last of *them*. . . . The crib would stand here; she could put another little dresser there. At last, with two babies to nurse, she would feel much more comfortable physically. Two babies growing up together,—what fun! It was like having twins, without having twins. She had always hoped that sooner or later she would have twins. . . . So that it was no time at all before Jenny was honestly of the opinion that the

most wonderful thing which could possibly happen was for Cynthia Rawlins to let her have that baby. As long as Cynthia Rawlins had to die . . .

"Well?" asked Billy at last.

"My, it's a long story, Billy!" In the end she read him the letter. "And so, my Billy, we find ourselves the proud parents, as it were, of another baby! . . . Billy Lamar, what makes your face look like that?"

"Jenny, I think it's terrible! The whole thing is terrible!"

"Terrible? How do you mean terrible?"

A cold fear clutched at Jenny's heart. Could it be that Billy, her Billy, thought . . .

"In the first place,—think of it! . . . I—why—I had no idea Mrs. Rawlins was that kind of a woman. And you being so friendly with her all this time! . . . And then she never confessed that she was in love with another man to her husband! . . . And—and *we* are expected to take the child into our home! Bring it up with *our* Steve! Why, Jenny, we can't be asked to do a thing like that!"

Jenny crept down under the covers and turned her face away. She longed to get 'way off some place in a dark corner and labor until she could piece her crumbled world together. All these years she had just taken it for granted that Billy thought about everything important as she did. They always had thought alike about everything under the skies. A few times among the girls at college Jenny had brought up the subject of "morals" in some of those midnight heart-to-heart talks every one indulges in when he can. The general result was summed up in a startled

chorus of "Jenny *Joslin!* How you *talk!* What would *become* of the world if everybody had the same terrible ideas that you have!" To which Jenny's reply was, "Somehow it doesn't look as if any of us would be alive to see." Once she lost her patience a bit and said: "At least I'm not going to make the world any *wickeder* for my having such ideas. Who knows but that some day I may have a chance to help some one, just because I have them."

But Billy. . . . And then she faced the honest truth that the reason she had never brought up the subject was that she was scared,—scared to face the fact that Billy too might belong to those who pointed the finger of scorn. It was the one matter on which she never had felt absolutely sure of him. Honest Jenny did not want to know the truth. Of *course* his ideas agreed with hers! Of *course* he would say that what other people did was none of his business!

"You're not really planning to bring that child here, are you, Jenny? Not really—"

Oh, oh, why was she not deaf!

"Jenny, why don't you talk? What's the matter?"

"Nothing." She felt very tired,—altogether too tired to argue.

"And I do think just the same that if you do consider such a thing you ought at once to explain the entire situation exactly to Dr. Rawlins."

"Billy!" Jenny almost shrieked at him.

"Jen, I do believe. . . . I don't know what to believe. . . . I think having a baby has sort of—unsettled your mind."

No, she was too weary to argue. She turned a little to one side and absent-mindedly looked at her baby. Cynthia Rawlins dead. . . . Again the warm tears filled her eyes. . . . Cynthia, who talked her language. She would love Cynthia's baby as she loved her own. . . . Perhaps at first it couldn't be *exactly* as much. . . . Yes, yes, it must be exactly as much! If possible she must love it more, so that it could never have the feeling that not being Jenny's own made any difference. . . . No, probably she couldn't love it *more*. But every bit as much. Oh, indeed she must do that! . . . Her mother, Dr. Cairns, Uncle Alec, Cynthia Rawlins—Billy. The people she had loved, did love, the most in all the world. Just Billy and Uncle Alec left. Oh, oh, oh—Steve! There was her Stephen Cairns Lamar! And Cynthia's baby!

"Aren't you going to talk any more, Jenny?"

"I'm tired."

Of course Billy would give in. It couldn't be he felt in his heart the way he had just spoken. "Didn't know Mrs. Rawlins was that kind of a woman. . . ." What business was it of Billy's? . . . If Billy made a difference,—if he insisted on loving Steve much more than Cynthia's baby, then she would have to love Cynthia's baby more than Steve to make up. She didn't want to—oh, she couldn't—love Cynthia's baby—any baby in the world—more than Steve. . . . Cynthia dead. . . . Billy. . . . If the boy grew up and made a great name for himself,—imagine some day . . . perhaps the whole United States celebrating Cynthia's baby's birthday . . . say he'd be forty years old then. She would invite Uncle Alec to a great dinner in

honor of young Mr. Rawlins—Alec—yes, yes, surely they could name him Alec—Rawlins, and after the dinner was over there would be speech-making—none of them too long. How proud of his namesake Uncle Alec would be! By that time the fearful hurt of Cynthia's death would be healed. Dr. Rawlins would surely be dead. . . . Goodness, goodness, Uncle Alec would be forty-six, plus forty,—goodness, eighty-six! Imagine Uncle Alec eighty-six! Steve forty! Billy sixty-three,—sixty-three! Just imagine Billy sixty-three! And she, Jenny, sixty-two. . . .

“Well, I guess if you don't want to talk I'll go in and eat my dinner.”

“Why, Billy, aren't you going to eat it here by me?”

“I don't know. I just thought to-night you would probably prefer that I ate in the dining-room.”

To-night? Oh, yes, it was difficult skipping back forty years with such speed. Perhaps he had better eat in the . . . No, no!

“Billy, you didn't meant what you said about Cynthia and her baby?”

“I certainly did mean it! I can't imagine you wanting that baby here in our house. I don't see what she had the baby for in the first place.”

The way he said “that baby”! . . . So, perhaps he had better eat in the dining-room. She was really too tired to talk.

He came back after dinner. “Feeling better?”

“Yes, much better. . . .”

Perhaps just as well to go to the bottom of the matter now.

"Billy, I don't know how soon you could go after the baby."

"I tell you, Jenny, I don't see why we have to have that baby in the house."

"So. . . . What do you suggest as an alternative?"

"That he gets reared by his own parent. A married woman goes falling in love with other men and takes a notion she isn't enthusiastic about her own husband, and then expects us to raise her child. What business had she, a married woman, going around with other men?"

"Billy, you could see from her letter . . . and you know Cynthia Rawlins. . . . What makes you talk like that?"

"I can't see such a lot of difference between her and a—a—prostitute. . . . I say it is a good thing she—died. . . . It would all have turned out all right if she had kept her mind on her own husband. . . . The first thing you know, you'll be going so far you'll defend illegitimate children. It is just such leniency as you show which makes all the trouble. Yes, sir, the earth would be covered with illegitimate children!"

"How many would you and I have, William, dear?"

"Jenny, how can you suggest such a thing!"

"I was just wondering if you excepted any one, that's all."

"Of course, people who have strong moral characters would not be in danger. There has to be solid public opinion to keep weak people straight."

"What has our being two—one hundred millionths of solid public opinion got to do with raising Cynthia Rawlins' baby?"

"There's no doubt about it, you always have a tendency to mix sentiment and right!"

"Solid public opinion won't miss us, Billy. For every backslider like me they gain two new recruits, perhaps. . . . I don't know. Sometimes I wonder if public opinion is as solid way down in its innermost heart as it likes to think it is. In the first place, there are all those like Cynthia Rawlins who hunger and long for the chance to live love through, if only once, with the Person of Persons. I can't believe she was the only married woman in existence who ever loved outside the rules! They must judge other wicked people a little less severely. They should feel a little pull of understanding and sympathy when the rest of the world would call 'shame!' There must be a great many people who ought to call 'shame!' very softly, if at all, since they really honestly don't know if they are—perfect because they are—perfect, or because they've never been put to the test. Then there must be many like me, whom it would hurt too much if they sat in judgment on others. . . . That leaves on your side—if it is your side—those who have been sorely tempted and have weathered the storm, coming out unscathed. . . . I wonder how many. . . . They, from their superior moral road, look down intolerantly on those weaker brethren below who slip, and falter, and fall. 'Why could not the Lord have created all as strong as we?' . . . I'm just guessing, you understand. . . . I wonder if anybody really knows. . . . And then there is the great mass of humanity, your real solid public opinion, part of whom really seem to enjoy making other people's business theirs and hurling names; part who

would be scared to death to catch their own selves thinking that there *could* be any ground for letting other folks and their ideas and actions alone. . . . Are you one of the tempted who refused to fall? Do you enjoy dissecting the sins of the world? Or are you frightened at the very idea of what would happen to your soul if you so much as whispered, 'What Cynthia Rawlins did is none of my business'?"

"You're not fair, Jenny! I guess at my age I know what's right and what's wrong, and, thank God, I intend to stand by the right!"

"Fine for you, Billy, and may you never falter! You see my only question is, need it concern you so terribly if Cynthia Rawlins, instead of living up to your idea of right, lived up to her own? Couldn't you, oh, dear, *dear* Billy, couldn't you say, 'What Cynthia Rawlins did or thought was none of my business'? I don't ask you to approve. I'm not implying you're to rush out yourself and waylay the first innocent young thing who comes along. Billy, please don't think I have my weather eye out for a likely opportunity to present you at the earliest possible moment with what you call an 'illegitimate' child. I only ask you to feel that what Cynthia Rawlins or any one else does or thinks or feels isn't really our concern,—it's only theirs, and we're not called upon to pass judgment."

"A man might as well be a fish, if he can't see the difference between right and wrong. . . . Let me ask you this, Jenny Lamar. What would you think if I had an—affair—with another woman?"

"It would undoubtedly break my heart into a thousand pieces."

"So you see—that answers the whole thing! . . . And I don't see why we should have Mrs. Rawlins' baby in our house. There's no telling what peculiar streak it will have inherited."

Jenny turned her head away and closed her eyes. "I'm tired, Billy."

2

A week later Dr. Rawlins received a letter from Jenny Lamar. Undoubtedly he was aware of Cynthia's wishes in regard to his child. (It was not until she came to write the letter that Jenny realized she had been proceeding all along on the assumption Cynthia's baby was a boy. For all she knew it was a girl.) She did want him to know that it would give her much satisfaction and pleasure to help bring up his child. It would be a heavy responsibility for him to have all the care on his shoulders. It was a great deal, on the other hand, to ask that he relinquish his child even part of the time to her. She fully understood that. But she would take such good care of it! She had milk enough for two babies, fortunately. . . . Mr. Lamar was leaving town shortly, therefore she would have to wait until she herself was strong enough to travel before the baby could be brought to her house. Or could it possibly be that Dr. Rawlins would be so very kind as to have some one bring the child to Jenny's house? She did want it as soon as possible, on account of its being

so good for the baby to have mother's milk. Everything would be ready for the little thing as soon as Dr. Rawlins would see to "delivering" it. She would bring the baby up with such care. Dr. Rawlins was to see him often.

She wrote a page about his loss in Cynthia's death. She was his sincerely, Jenny Lamar.

Dr. Rawlins never knew there could be such a stupid affair in all his life. He wrote Jenny Joslin that he had made arrangements with her Aunt Emie to take care of his son himself.

That letter came two days after William had packed his suitcase and left for—some place. He had promised Jenny it was what he would do if she wrote to Dr. Rawlins and asked for that baby. So Jenny would have to wait a month or so before she could travel after the child. The thought of that trip, and the inevitable session with Dr. Rawlins, was quite enough to cause Jenny to give Steve the colic. When she saw that Billy did not come back in at most two nights, Steve got the colic again. The colossal effort it was, for the sake of Steve, to keep her thoughts along a certain rigidly defined narrow course! She was so used to Billy filling her mind most of the day. She was so used to his presence morning and night, his loving. She was not at all used to wearing mental blinders. Indeed it was quite her first experience, galling beyond words. Always, always, she had been able to follow through comfortably every idea which came into her head. Not even to be allowed to cry at night! If she did, Steve

cried all the next day. It was too costly a price for her tears.

If only she could send some one else after Cynthia's baby. Yet no one could go but herself, because of the dreaded session with Dr. Rawlins. And always, always, always, waiting to hear Billy's footstep on the front porch. . . .

3

The nurse and doctor insisted she must not take the train trip. Jenny explained that her upset condition would continue until that trip was done and over with. Finally it was arranged to care for Steve over one nursing. She made her agitated way to the station, boarded the train. She too, like Billy, was doing the right as she saw it. What terrible prices one could pay for trying in the wavering way of human beings to do the best one knew how. . . . Was it utter foolishness in the eyes of the gods who had seemed to forget her altogether these last weeks? How could one really know what was right? Was anything which separated Billy and her right? After all it was not really her business to raise Cynthia Rawlins' child. . . . Oh, it was, it *was*! Cynthia, much older than she, much wiser than she,—she knew. Dr. Rawlins—Aunt Emie. . . . It was worse than murder. It *was* her business to rescue that little life before it froze to death in that half-a-century-old atmosphere of respectability. . . . The gods never had forgotten Jenny for long. . . . Billy would come back, she knew, and once more she could blow a kiss to heaven. It was smart of Billy to run away. It meant she would

be so glad to have him back she wouldn't care in the least what his ideas were about anything. She was very wise to have married such a wise husband. And if Billy did come back—when Billy did come back—he'd be so glad to be back he wouldn't care in the least what her ideas were about anything.

But if he made a difference between Steve and Cynthia's boy? . . . Then he would just have to leave home again awhile until he learned that such actions were really not Christian. You could not let any one take his moral ideas out on a child.

After all, what she had to do now was just one thing,—try to get Cynthia's baby somehow without hurting Dr. Rawlins' feelings in the matter. Dr. Rawlins—Aunt Emie—bringing up Cynthia's baby. No! As a doctor he ought to realize the importance of mother's milk for the child. That of course was her trump card. And once she got the baby—even Dr. Rawlins would have to see what a good job she made of raising him!

She rang the doctor's office bell. "Ah, Miss Jenny—Mrs. Lamar, I should say. You have come, I take it, in answer to my letter about the will."

The will . . . ?

Why, yes, Mrs. Rawlins' will. He had had his attorney advise Miss—that is, Mrs. Lamar, that Mrs. Rawlins had left practically everything to her. The letter was mailed yesterday.

It was the first time Jenny had thought about the money Cynthia was to leave her. She remembered now, of course.

Cynthia had spoken of it in the letter. . . . No, she had come about the baby. . . .

Yes, what about the baby?

She—she wanted to take the baby home with her. . . .

Dr. Rawlins shaded his face with his hand. . . . Albert Rawlins, Junior, his son, had died a week after he answered Mrs. Lamar's letter.

He dropped his head suddenly on his desk. Jenny stared ahead of her. . . . Cynthia's baby dead. . . . She looked over at Dr. Rawlins. . . . To lose a baby! . . . Her heart seemed to be crushed within her at the very thought. Suddenly she dashed across the room and threw her arms around Dr. Rawlins' shoulder.

"Oh, oh . . . I'm so . . . I can't tell you how . . . Oh . . ."

And Jenny dropped down on her knees beside him and wept as if her heart would break. She felt a heavy arm on her shoulder, through her sobs she heard his, "Ah, but Miss Jenny, Miss Jenny,—I knew what it was to be a father! I knew what it was to have a son!"

"I'm so happy for you," sobbed Jenny, "so, so happy for you!"

When she could collect herself enough she crept out of the room and down the street. She must say a word to Aunt Emie before returning home.

She opened the front door softly. There sat Aunt Emie in the front parlor. How woe-begone she looked!

"Jenny, bless my soul, you scared me! . . . I declare, you look as if you'd been crying!"

"I've just seen Dr. Rawlins. I didn't know about the baby's—dying."

Aunt Emie dropped heavily into a chair and nervously bit the end of her handkerchief. The tears would come.

"If—oh, if you could only know what it means to me—that baby's dying. . . . Jenny, he was to have been almost like my very own! I was to have helped raise him—it was all decided. Can you guess what that meant? I could have washed him and dressed him, and wheeled him around in a buggy and given him his bottle. . . . We were to sleep in the same room, he and I! A little crib next to my bed. . . . Jenny, I—I wanted a baby to look after so. You were too big when I came. I couldn't understand you. You didn't let me do things for you,—always you could do everything for yourself. . . . Isn't there any one who needs me in all the world? . . . Only think, Jenny. . . . Think what Albert Rawlins' baby would have meant to me. . . . I would have loved him more, I do believe, than his father! . . . At least the happiest days of all my life were the few weeks I had planning for that little baby."

In a haze of countless emotions, Jenny put her arms around Aunt Emie, and for the second time that day, wept as if her heart would break.

Somehow she got to the train, somehow she got home. Billy opened the door for her,—Billy! . . . The comfort of the long, long kiss of lovers. . . .

"Where's the baby?"

In the turmoil of her soul Jenny could not miss the fact that Billy said "the baby" and not "that baby."

"He's—dead."

It had all been too much, and having Billy home again. . . . He put her to bed himself.

"Darn it all, Jenny. I wish he'd lived. I did want a chance to show you what a good sport I could be. I was going to be a wonder of a father to that boy!"

After all it was not the word "that." It was how one said it.

"Billy, my own, own Billy." Whereupon she indulged in the last luxury of tears she would allow herself for—life, she hoped. Yet they were the tears of comfort.

PART II

CHAPTER VIII

I

To Jenny, in the first sullen tragedy of Billy's death, it seemed like the end of her youth. On that June day, so warm, so living, all that was warm and living in her ended. Henceforth she was to go through the years a cold, raw,—no, not clay-like,—thing. Better clay-like, that she might not feel the rawness. She lay on her face in the dark bedroom. Outside, the light and sun made her own blackness more piercing. Besides there was the terrible fear lest she see some one. Only think of it,—to be afraid of *people*! All one's life to rush forward, hands outstretched toward friend and stranger. And then suddenly, this way, fearful lest a single human being might appear. If she just had her mother. No, no, not even her mother. . . . Uncle Alec, dear Uncle Alec, just to be smoking beside the bed, saying nothing. . . . No, not even Uncle Alec. . . . Cynthia Rawlins. . . . No, no,—nobody, nobody. Just Billy, Billy, Billy! Why was not Billy here, now that she needed him most? Never had she suffered a fraction of what she was suffering now—and Billy—dead. Foolishness. What else was she suffering about, except that Billy was—dead.

How queer the world could get! Everything pressing in on you—yet nothing there. Empty, all empty. . . . Why should there be a world at all any more? What was

the excuse of everything keeping on going round and round and round, suns rising and setting, flowers blooming and fading, birds, animals, people . . . round and round . . . busy, getting up, going to bed. . . . Music, play—laughter. . . . No, no, there could be no more laughter. Why any of it, why anything, without Billy? . . . Busy, getting up, going to bed. . . . What was there left for any one to do? . . . Getting up?—think of it,—opening your eyes in the morning to a new day—and that bed next yours—empty. God, close your eyes again quick! Never open them again, never, never! Shut out the emptiness—shut it out! . . . But when one went on living, eyes refused to stay forever shut. . . . Dress on the side of the bed and look hard at the wall. Rush downstairs . . . oh, oh—no sitting on the edge of the bathtub mornings while Billy shaved! Shaving. . . . Was she never to see Billy shave again? . . . That way he pulled his cheek over and looked down sideways at her as he worked the razor along. . . . And always a dab of shaving soap suds he managed to get on her nose. . . . And that kiss, after his face was washed and smooth, almost like a woman's, and so smelling of shaving soap still. . . . Billy, Billy, come back and shave once more—just once more!

Breakfast. . . . No, no, she could not eat breakfast again. . . . That chair next hers. . . . Never were she and Billy happy when he sat at one end of the table, she at the other. "Let me move down by you!" So he brought his chair back to where they always sat that first year, right as close together as they could get. . . . She couldn't move the chair away,—never that! She couldn't possibly

leave it there, empty. . . . Oh, that hateful word. . . . That cruel word. . . . EMPTY. . . . All the world was that, —empty. EMPTY . . . EMPTY.

The walk about the garden just after breakfast, when she showed him what had blossomed since yesterday. Billy's joke—to pretend to kick some loved little plant. "Ugly thing!" he'd growl. "I'll fix it!" and then he always kissed her quick—in the garden, in the morning sunshine. . . . Would the flowers really go on blooming? How could they?

The walk to the corner. When it never was the corner, because he always said, "Just half a block more!"

There used to follow a whole glad day of work and babies and play, all heading toward six o'clock when Billy got home from the office. The entire day caught its impetus from the glad early morning, and held on its joyous course, steering ever toward evening and Billy's homecoming. What now could ever start her off? What keep her going through the hour after hour which made up a day?

But everything—*everything* was bearable compared to the thought of evening. . . . His step on the front porch, her dash to reach the door before he could open it. And then—his kiss.

Through what a gamut of intensity a husband's homecoming kiss could run. There were some husbands and wives who never kissed at all. Was it because they were born that way at the start, or had gotten tired of kissing generally, or had wearied only of kissing each other?

Or there were husbands and wives who just—yes, you had to use the same word, because there seemed to be no

other. They kissed—but how! She had seen them,—a momentary contact of lips, kept up night after night for lack of energy to discontinue the habit.

But the way Billy kissed—oh, the way Billy kissed. . . . The last hour each had been living for that home-coming kiss. . . . When they closed the front door, and Billy leaned his back against it, and took her in his arms—for long, long, long. . . . At last, at last, they were together again. “My darling, oh, my darling.”

Billy! Billy! Come back—oh, come back and kiss her again—that way—that home-coming way—where you crushed her to you, where you closed your eyes, where at last, at last—each was where each belonged, close in the other’s arms. My darling, oh, my darling. . . .

It can’t be, it can’t be, that never, never again in all her life will Jenny feel those arms around her, those lips against hers. . . . Billy!

Supper—their suppers. . . . The children in bed, songs sung, stories told—and their supper. Just herself and Billy, all alone, chairs as close as they could get them. He told her of his day,—the men he had seen, what they talked about at lunch, how business was going. Happy jabberings and stories and laughter—she and Billy.

Evenings . . . in winter by the fire, in summer out on the porch or in the rose arbor, reading, talking, visiting perhaps with friends who dropped in. The comfort of it. . . . The completeness of it. . . . Billy right there,—her Billy.

And then . . . God, oh, God! . . . And then—bed. No, no, it couldn’t be! It wasn’t so! Billy! Billy! Some

place he must be—Billy! She could stand it all—somehow—but not that. . . . Not going to bed alone. Billy—come back for the night time! His bed . . . empty . . . empty . . . empty.

Yes, Billy—no use calling. . . . Jenny knew you were gone forever, forever . . . gone forever. . . . And you left her here behind. . . .

What for? What was the use of that? No use. Days . . . nights . . . days . . . nights . . . days. . . .

“Mother, I want so much to come in.”

So,—there were the boys. . . . She had Alec and Steve. She loved Alec and Steve, loved them, loved them. But somehow—a grown man. . . . Billy. Billy came so very much first! . . . She wished that she could lie still that way on her face . . . for long. . . .

“I’ll open the door for you, Steve. Wait a moment.”

2

“The best thing for you would be to get started in something,—something interesting.”

Every one meant well. Every one was very kind. What a strange word, “interesting.” As if there really could be anything interesting left in the world. . . .

“The best thing for you would be to move, if you possibly could,—to go to some new place, away from all the associations of the last seven years.”

Move? . . . Get things packed? . . . Decide where to go? . . . Get there? . . . Be in a strange place, among strange people? . . . What queer advice people could give

when they had no idea what it was like to go around with one's world cut in two, as it were. A great knife had slashed right through the very middle of Jenny—there was just half of her left on earth. Where the knife had cut, she was raw and bleeding. When people came, it was as if they scraped something across the rawness and made the flesh quiver. Yet every one was so kind. Only they did not understand, of course, about the knife and the rawness, and that half a person, cut like that, and bleeding, could not possibly be traveling about creation, finding "interesting" things to do in a strange place.

3

Only those who have suffered severely know the debt they owe to that gentle quiet healer of all wounds, that patient friend of the sorrowing who alone and unaided—and often against tremendous odds—can work such miracles,—Time. Ah, how one can come to lean on that comforter of comforters, and bless his peaceful ways! To those yearning for the future and its gifts, he travels with a snail-like pace, unmindful of hearts beating high in anticipation. That is because he knows he has something even more important to do than hasten the happiness of the eager. Anticipation in and of itself carries its own measure of satisfaction even while it counts the days and hours to complete fulfilment.

No, Time is for the sorrowing, and goes therefore slowly, so that his warm hand laid so tenderly may really heal. Time is for those who think that never more can they

look forward to the days and years ahead. In the past was there comfort, in the past was there laughter and song. Only into that past too they dare not look, lest the bleeding of those wounds start afresh. Fearful of or indifferent to the future, too raw to live in the past . . . there comes a time in some lives where each moment is lived for itself alone: this much I have got through; this much is behind me,—one moment. . . . To-morrow? No, no. How can to-morrow be faced, when it means another supper, and evening, and bed, alone? And the dark, the terrible dark, alone. . . . Dreams, yes, dreams. . . . Dreams where you search round and round, until your weary feet bleed,—and there he is! My lover, oh, my lover! I thought I had lost you! You were gone so long, so long. . . . With a start you are awake. The terrible dark again, the bed, empty. It is all worse for the dream. . . . No, no, to-morrow is all of an evening and a night away. . . . A year ago to-day—that was the very day you walked to Henry Meadows'—Billy wore that funny blue and green necktie of his. . . . Close your eyes quick. . . . There was no last year,—not that Jenny can look back upon yet. . . . The wound,—that cut down half her body. . . . No, no,—not last year, yet.

To-day is like yesterday. To-morrow will be like to-day. This week is like last week. Next week will be like this week. This month is like last month. Next month will be like this month. . . . Wait a bit, Jenny! Wait a bit. Was this month exactly as wretched as last month? Will next month be exactly as wretched as this? Have you forgotten your friend, your friend who never forgets you

for one moment of your waking or your sleeping hours? You are reckoning without Time! Disregard him. Forget him entirely. Say he is no friend of yours, no help, no comfort. Abuse him early and late. He is the sort of friend who works on, regardless. . . . You don't *want* to be healed? You would drag along forever, raw and bleeding? Time takes no notice of your desires. He goes about his ministrations with those soft, caressing, comforting hands of his. . . .

Ah, Jenny, in your heart you know that this month you are stronger than last. You know, Jenny Lamar, that next month you will be more comforted than this. . . . Yes, Jenny knows.

"Thank You, God." There is no kiss to heaven, no smile. She is grateful that the wound is not quite so open, that she is learning to move about a little with that half of her which is left. "Thank you, *Time*."

4

"I like the new boys in our new home, mother."

"That's good!"

"But I hate Alec. He makes me sick. Some day I think I'll kill him."

"So. . . . Have you planned just how?"

"No, just kill him. . . . Would you miss him, mother?"

"I'd miss him very much."

"I s'pose it wouldn't be just right, then, with you not having Pop and all. . . . P'r'aps I won't kill him neither, if you'd miss him."

"Thank you, Steve, you're a good sort. . . . Where's Alec now?"

"Search me!"

"But it's supper time."

"He had a big bag of licorice shoestrings with him. He's not hungry."

"Steve! Where did he get the licorice shoestrings?"

"Search me!"

"Did you eat some too?"

"No, *sir!*"

"That's my good son."

"That's why I'm going to kill Alec, after all!"

"So?"

"He wouldn't give me none."

"So."

"I bet a dollar when I get a bag of licorice shoestrings I won't give him none!"

"Won't give him *any*."

". . . . Won't give him *any*. . . . You just bet I won't give him none!"

". . . . *Any*."

"*Any*."

Alec does not appear for supper. . . . Alec does not appear after supper. . . . The new neighbors, through Steve's family pride, hear that Alec is lost. Everybody helps hunt for Alec. . . . If only Steve sometime could cause half that much excitement. . . . Strangers further than the immediate neighborhood, also all strange, take up the search. The police are enlisted. At ten o'clock Jenny

Lamar returns home again to see if there is any news of Alec. A large fat policeman takes her arm.

"You're the mother of the child that ran away?"

Yes, she's the mother.

He leads her into the dining room. There is Alec, sound asleep under the dining-room table, generously bedaubed with licorice.

The fat policeman looks proud. "I always find more lost children than any other man on the force. Mostly they're upstairs asleep in bed. Quite a number are under the dining-room tables. When he wasn't in bed I looked here. . . . Don't mention it. . . . Yes, I'm a pretty popular man about town with folks ownin' children of uncertain habits. . . . At your service, madame, any time! . . . Don't forget,—bed, or under the dining-room table. . . . Good night. . . . Don't mention it!"

At last all the searchers are called in, one way or another. Every one gathers in Jenny's new home,—that is, new for Jenny—and chatters and tells all the stories of lost children each knows. The men in their relief smoke and reminisce. The women laugh a good deal, because they too are so relieved. No one in all the world likes the idea of a child lost at night. . . . Every one introduces Jenny several times over to each new batch of scouters, back to headquarters to hear if the child really is found, and how, and where. They in turn laugh with relief, and tell all the lost-child stories they know, most of which have already been told that evening by friends and relatives. Jenny brings out all the canned goods she possesses, and the grape

juice, and the ginger ale, and every one helps, and every one laughs, and Jenny,—how she laughs again with her neighbors!—these dear good friendly people, strangers all up to that very evening. She is mortified at the trouble she put them to; she is ashamed to think that she did not look under the dining-room table herself the first thing. But how then would she ever have known how kind these open-hearted new people are? The comfort of brushing up against fellow beings again. . . . She had thought to be so quiet in this new town. She had hoped to meet a few people—by and by. Perhaps, after several months, she might even feel like inviting one or two in again for tea. . . . In that other life—how she had welcomed all creation to her hearth, the more and oftener the better! . . . Since . . . Since . . . How scared she was of people now! . . . There was always the long fight to prepare oneself to look and talk as if one felt inwardly calm. Always the dread lest some word be spoken which would necessitate more strength than one could summon to keep the wound from bleeding again. . . . Always the empty feeling, stronger than ever, when one was left alone once more. . . .

Here she was in the midst of thirty people, all of them laughing, joking, eating bread and sardines without butter at eleven o'clock at night. . . . Out in the kitchen six neighbors were making molasses candy. She was running back and forth, her heart in her throat in very thankfulness that once more she could hold her own, could laugh with the others. Her splendid new friends!

Only at the last, a tall heavy man whose name of course

she did not catch in the avalanche of introductions, grasped her hand warmly and as he said his jovial good-by, called out:

“Hope to meet the good husband next time, Mrs. Lamar! Lucky man! Lucky man!”

His wife clutched his arm in desperation and dragged him off. “What’s that? what’s that? You don’t say! Good Lord, don’t get so worked up over it! How was I to know? . . .” and so on, down the road.

Jenny Lamar, get used to things like that. Don’t let such remarks spoil your evening. . . . People,—you were with people again! You felt their friendliness, they felt yours. Thirty new friends all at once! . . . And she had thought perhaps never in her life again would she have the courage, the strength, the—must she say it?—the desire, to have thirty friends.

Thank You, God! After eight months that were as eight thousand years, for the first time she put her finger to her lips and blew the old, old kiss to heaven, and a faint—yes, the gods saw it—a faint smile was there.

It *was* easier going to bed in a new and different room, with a little bran’-new bed in it. . . . Which of her new friends would she probably see to-morrow?

There she was,—thinking about to-morrow!

Thank you, Time—and Change!

5

The money from Cynthia Rawlins was not to be used any more than was absolutely necessary. That was for

Steve and Alec, in case anything should happen to her, and for their education, later. She must find some work to do.

Such years since she had lifted a finger outside her own home. Billy, babies,—they had filled her life. . . . More and more she realized Billy, more than babies. Babies took her time, it was true. But her world had centered around him. . . . She somehow had a horror of getting to the point now where her life would center entirely around the boys. It would be unhealthy for them, unhealthy for her. A widow with two sons. . . . No, she refused to accept for one moment the picture of herself sending them off to school in the morning, hungering wretchedly for them during the day, suffering because they dashed off to play as soon as they got home. A woman without a husband too often let her children absorb her whole personality. Some people thought that the proper state of affairs. Perhaps, by and by, she would have no personality left for them to absorb. . . . Jenny opened her eyes wide and stared at the ceiling in the dark bedroom,—the dark she forgot to be afraid of now four nights out of seven. Could it ever happen, perhaps, that when a woman lived just for a man,—a man and her children, that in the end the man himself might find she had no personality left to give? Billy—Billy had his work, his friends, his busy days. Indeed the time might have come when Jenny needed to bestir herself and be about affairs of some importance herself. . . . Billy had gone ahead right along. How much smarter was Jenny now than the day she left college? Just as much smarter as seven to eight years of being as good a wife and mother as she knew how, made her. Never in all those years had she felt

one tinge of the old college ambition, never once a desire to do or be anything "on her own."

Suddenly, stirring away down faintly in the soul of her came a whisper of the old call of those days at Hastings. The old urge to be about again out in the world, seeing what was going on, helping a bit here and there, taking a hand again in something that counted outside . . . outside in that world which had come to her more or less second-hand, through Billy, and their friends. Never, never had she wanted it first-hand. In her heart of hearts she knew her soul, mind, and body had found absolute contentment in those seven years. There had been no empty crack or cranny in her system for any desire outside Billy and the babies to find lodgment. Indeed, through all those full seven years, the very idea of a wife and mother busying about outside in the world had annoyed her. Any woman could find enough to keep herself busy with a husband and children to look after.

With children *and* a husband,—*and* a husband. . . .

But now, with Billy gone, there was such an enormous hole in her, such an emptiness. She would not let the boys fill it, even if they could. She had been what Billy had considered a perfect wife those seven years. Seven years more of centering her life completely in her family, and she knew she would make anything but a perfect mother.

Even then, if she had not needed the money, she wanted just a bit to try her hand again,—to be out in the world.

Clubs again, meetings again, committees again? Perish the thought! No, she knew just what she wanted. It was to be at a job, among men.

But what, Jenny Lamar, is your stock in trade?

And Jenny Lamar actually laughed a bit between the sheets. "I shall go up to the President of the Largest Mill and say, 'Please, mister, I should like to be First Vice President of your Company.'

" 'How so?' would growl the big fat Mill President.

" 'Please, mister, I was Treasurer of the Women's Mandolin Club in my Sophomore year at college!' "

"I shall buy a typewriter to-morrow," announced Jenny Lamar to herself, "and learn *something!*"

CHAPTER IX

I

"QUITE a bit of mail to tend to this morning, Mrs. Lamar!"

"Yes, quite a bit. I've answered all but those top three letters."

"Goodness, a club wanting me to make a speech! Never,—that's one thing I can't and won't do. I know a principal is supposed to go about planting the seeds of enlightenment, but—I'd just collapse making a speech before a crowd like that."

"I've already answered that letter."

"Bless you,—you save me no end of trouble in this world. Hope you put it politely and all that. What did you say?—I had another date for that evening, or had a cold and couldn't talk, or did you come right out with it and say I couldn't talk anyhow, cold or no cold, because I'm too scared?"

"None of any of that. I said you'd be very glad indeed to address them, and that your charges were fifty dollars."

"Mrs. Lamar! Good Lord, you're joking!"

"No, I'm not. You can see the carbon copy of the letter."

"But it isn't mailed, the letter?"

"It's entirely mailed."

"You said *yes*?"

"I said *yes*."

"But, Mrs. Lamar, I can't, I simply can't give an address like that!"

"How do you know you can't?"

"Why—why, I just know it."

"And I know you can. And you're going to."

"Here's a letter from this poor Simpson. That's the fourth. It hurts every time I think about that man and his family. But he *is* a wretched teacher. We can't take him back, yet I haven't the heart to say no outright."

"I answered his letter."

"Not really?"

"Yes. I've been at work on Mr. Simpson's case a month, and I've got him a good job teaching English at the mill. With some little work on the side, he'll make more than he made here. He'll be all right with workers. It's boys and girls he can't understand."

"I declare. . . . You won't ever get married or anything like that and leave this job, will you?"

"Oh, no! It's too much fun messing into your affairs. I'll stay till I have you stumping the state. Placards on every signpost: 'To-night Monster Open Air Mass Meeting! Hear Our Pride, the Great American Orator, Address 10,000 Citizens on the Subject of—' By that time I'll let you chose your own subject."

"You'll stay a long while!"

"And I'll stay until every morning you come in this door with a smile on your face."

"But I've got so many things on my mind!"

"Pooh,—you and your mind. Somebody failed to speak to you yesterday in the same tone of voice they used three weeks ago. The Board of Education left fifty-six cents off your pay check. The City Council is pestering over the picture of the Rhine in the history room. The price of Manila envelopes has gone up. Archie Jones' father called to see if it was true that Miss Alby said that anybody objected to the Constitution at the time it was passed. . . . Your mind!"

"It's all very well for you to joke about it. You come from a home where two children have pushed the cares of the day into the background. I go home and have nothing to do but think of what's gone wrong. The first thing my sister always asks me is, 'What's gone wrong to-day, Thomas?' By the time I get to work in the morning we've talked and thought so much about everything unpleasant that I just know the new day will be as full of upsetting affairs as the day just passed. . . . I think—pardon my saying it—but I think you ought to take life more seriously yourself. It fairly scares me to see a grown person being so—so—I don't know. You really ought to worry more."

"About what?"

"I don't know—but you're always finding something to laugh about. It—it sort of scares me. Lately I've caught myself starting to laugh at things, too. It—it unbalances me. I lose my footing, as it were. Only yesterday my sister Agnes told me a story about one of our neighbors and before I knew it I was laughing. She was fearfully shocked and hurt. Said it was really very important. . . .

It *is* funny, though, how seriously neighbors can take other neighbors' affairs."

"Ha, when you chuckle like that—oh, but you're improving!"

"But you won't—Mrs. Lamar, you won't find another job, will you? . . . Only, good Lord, woman, I can't give that address!"

"You can give that address."

"I say, if I do give it, will you let me rehearse it on you ahead of time?"

2

"I say, Mrs. Lamar."—This a month or so later.

"First change the look on your face. Nothing in the world is going badly enough to warrant such glumness."

"But first listen. The Board is planning to reduce the High School budget, right when our three best teachers are contemplating leaving anyhow, because of the low pay!"

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Why, there's nothing to do about it. Goodness knows what will happen to the school. And we need a physics teacher the worst way,—it's a disgrace not having a first-class physics teacher."

"And you're going to do nothing about it?"

"What is there to do?"

"At least you can go to the Board,—see each member personally; then get permission to speak at the Board meeting. And if they still persist in impoverishing us, tell

them we'll take it before the people! Oh, we could have no end of fun,—mass meetings and student meetings, and club meetings and newspaper publicity. . . . Oh, oh, I almost wish they'd refuse!"

"You—you simply take my breath away. Why, they'd probably fire me if I meddled the least bit in the budget business."

"Then let them fire you. . . . You can't sit like a bump on a log and allow them to pick your pockets!"

"Do you really think they'd listen to me? Could I talk so that they'd get the idea?"

"Of course they would. Of course you could. How did that speech go you were never going to give? You see! Four more letters about addresses have I answered in the last two days and accepted them all. . . . What you won't do to that Board . . . !"

"I'm sick, sick over this budget question. If I could ever get away from it!"

"You can. We'll go out now and take a walk. Then you'll treat me to a chocolate ice cream soda at Selby's—here's your hat—and then it will be time for you to go home and weep with sister Agnes over the sorrows of the world. So that you'll surely feel natural and woe-begone and sufficiently full of despair by evening. . . . Suppose you should go to sleep some night with a smile on your face—my, the air's good out here in the wide world! . . . Just accidentally one of the gods might look down and see you. I say 'just accidentally,' because I don't think the gods look at you as a rule any more than they can help. They have enough troubles of their own without adding yours on.

But once you did smile, and it stuck after you went to sleep, and one god happened to note it passing by—or over. I know what. He puts two fingers in his mouth and whistles (I never *could* whistle that way) and all the other gods look up from their labors—or rest periods—and call, ‘Hey, what ho?’ The first god grins and gives his head a sideways jerk, so,—‘Come see for yourselves,’ and points down to where you and sister Agnes eat and sleep and hold troubled converse over the mistakes of man and beast. The other gods know that no god puts his two fingers between his lips and whistles that way without its really being a Big Sight. So they all come trailing over the humps and bumps in the clouds as fast as their flowing robes allow. All group themselves around the first god, and bend over and put their hands on their knees, and peer on down through heaven and your and sister Agnes’ roof. ‘Himmel!’ one god smites his forehead with his hand, ‘it can’t be so!’ ‘Himmel!’ another god smites his forehead with his hand, ‘it can’t be so!’ And as each sees that smile of yours, each god falls over backwards and lies stretched out as flat as the humps and bumps of the clouds will allow. Only the first god kept his balance, and he tore for the bulletin board and nailed up a large placard covering the whole space:

“‘THOMAS HATCH SMILED!!!’

“And when the gods came to, they declared a half holiday and let the world run itself for six whole glorious grand untrampled hours of messes and irregularities (ha, business

as usual!) while they had a feast of—of salted almonds and milk chocolate and sardine butter and hearts of lettuce salad with Russian dressing and fried scallops and French fried potatoes and more salted almonds and frozen Alaska pudding and chocolate and whipped cream and more and more whipped cream and Turkish delight candies and more salted almonds and more whipped cream and . . .”

“Jenny Lamar, you talk as if you were ten years old!”

“Ooh, you don’t know what fun a grown person has if they just understand the gods! You have no idea how grateful the gods are for being understood—it happens so rarely. You see—I’m their pet. They love me because I know just how to take them. . . . Once they let real trouble come to me. . . . They can’t help things like that. Really, you know, they have so little say any more. They know I know how hard it is, especially on the old ones, who are used to folks thinking they managed everything all these centuries. . . . We have a sort of understanding, the gods and I. They’re quite human, you know, gods are. They like to see people happy,—that’s why I’m such a pet of theirs. They’re perfectly miserable when things go wrong,—but there’s nothing much they can do about it. . . . Adam—Adam was all right alone. He and the gods would have fared peacefully enough. But Eve muddled things up so. The gods never took quite the same interest in the world since Eve appeared,—‘No matter what we do, the women will mess it up again!’ . . . They’re men, you know, the gods. It goes against my grain to think of there being women gods. They’d be in some sort of difficulty all the time if there were women gods too. . . .

And yet, they'd understand mortals so much better, wouldn't they—I mean the male gods would—if there were female gods? . . . I suppose they would still find time for some of us humans. . . . The busiest men in the world do manage to keep their minds off their women folk often numerous hours in the day, so the gods surely could. . . . They'd always go on loving me, for I'd understand any trouble any of them got into and never would care a bit, because it would be none of my business, and I'd love them all, no matter what they did. . . . That's it, you see. They know I love them. They know I never blame them for a single thing. Way back with Eve the world got out of hand,—women and work,—it was too much for the gods, the complexities that arose. I flatter them, I blame them for nothing, hold nothing against them, and thank them for everything nice. Who wouldn't be pleased, under those circumstances?"

"Where in the world do you get such ideas?"

"They just pop into my head. I never thought of any of it before,—don't think I'm perpetually feeble-minded. But I loved the idea of a lot of jolly gods peering down through the clouds at your smile and nudging each other in the ribs and falling over backwards. . . . Don't you feel grand walking like this?"

"It is fine."

"Then say so! Don't wait to have pleasant sentiments prodded out of you with a pitchfork."

They stood looking down at the lake a bit, then walked on.

"What things do you like to do most in the world?"

Jenny asked Thomas Hatch. "What do you think is most fun?"

"Why, I don't know. I—I don't think there is much fun in the world."

"Mercy!"

"Really is there now? What, for instance?"

"Well, isn't this fun, walking along a road like this?"

"Yes, yes, this is fun. But—I'm almost scared to enjoy it. It will end so soon, and then there's all the trouble and worry of the world ahead."

"In the first place, it isn't ended yet, and it's glorious while it's lasting—everything warm and smelling of grass and earth. Don't you love the smell of things?"

"I don't know,—I never noticed the smell."

"Well, sniff! Isn't it good?"

"It smells—why, it smells just the way any walk smells—just grass and earth."

"But don't you love to smell grass and earth?"

"I don't know, I never thought about it."

"Do you like to fish?" Jenny again.

"To fish?"

"Yes, catch fish—hook—rod—line—*fish!*"

"I don't know, I never fished."

"Never *fished!*"

"No, how could I? I—I never—I don't know anything about fishing."

"I say, sometime we'll go fishing!"

"There's no place to fish around here."

"There is! The boys and I go almost every week end."

We take our fishing tackle and sleeping bags and a frying pan and oh, say, the fun we have! Come next week end with us!"

"You mean—you sleep out all night?"

"Yes, under the stars,—it's heavenly! Have you got a sleeping bag?"

"A what?"

"A sleeping bag. Get your sister Agnes to make you one,—I'll tell her how. We won't take her along—she'd ruin the trip. I know her,—everything ought to go wrong if it doesn't. Besides, it would do you good to get away from sister Agnes a week end. So that's settled,—next week end."

"But, Mrs. Lamar—you don't mean— Goodness, you're always taking my breath away. You mean we—stay out all night? . . . Why, it's—it's rather—irregular, isn't it?"

"If you weren't really so very nice I surely would give you up altogether in despair. . . . If you mean it isn't down in black and white in Agnes' book of 'Advice to High School Principals and Their Secretaries,' page thirty-seven, paragraph two, it's irregular. But the gods—oh, the gods would love it! I've been longing to have a man along. The boys go to sleep early, and I sit by the fire all alone and look at the stars and think what a chance it would be to get acquainted with somebody. I love talking with a man—much, much better than talking with a woman. I love mental adventuring with a man. Only you yourself need a powerful lot of dragging along. . . . Don't you like adventurings?"

"You ask me about such queer things. I don't know anything about adventurings."

"I mean, don't you love to start out to do things or think things when you haven't any idea where the doing or thinking is really going to land you? There's nothing in the world like adventure! It is my very pet god, him I worship above all. . . . Adventure! . . . Oh, oh—to start off just any place and *go*—when you know you're a pet of the gods and everything can't help but turn out all right in the end!"

"But, you see, I would never have that feeling."

"Never mind! Start out anyway! I get thrills up and down my system just thinking of it. . . . There was a time when I thought my pet god had forsaken me altogether. I was scared, too. I know what it is to be scared. 'Never again,' I said to myself, 'never again will I know the longing to venture forth into the new and untried. Always I must see the way far ahead, every sign post, and talk long with others of the route, and have company along the march.' Nothing is so terrible as to feel chains, to feel tied. . . . Suddenly, for no particular reason, just one day on the street car, flowers bloomed again for me, I heard laughter, snatches of song. The sky was oh, so blue once more. And the chains which bound me fell away. The tumult of my soul! To know I was free again—that my heart had found its god again! 'I'll go to India,' I cried. 'I'll see Lapland!' . . . Anyhow, I packed up and moved to your town. . . .

"Some day I shall see every inch of the whole wide world—every *inch*. Some day I shall try a thousand dif-

ferent jobs—touch life here, there, and every place, feel myself part of all creation, one with black and white, rich and poor, young and old. I shall have seen it all, lived it all, loved it all . . . I, Jenny Lamar!”

She stood on a rock under the oldest pine on the south hill. Suddenly she flung out her arms wide. . . . The soft wind blew the waves of hair back off her face, her eyes blazed, her cheeks flushed. . . .

“I, Jenny Lamar! My world, my people! I, part and parcel of the stars and every man and woman and child that breathes, and every tree and every flower! They are mine, I am theirs!”

One arm still outstretched, the breezes in her hair and blue summer dress, she pressed her other hand against her lips, and blew that old, old kiss to heaven,—fire in it again, strength in it again.

“Oh, I shall be whole yet,—whole, whole, whole!”

Thomas Hatch looked at her transfixed. Was she human, poised on the rock like that? Suddenly his heart leapt within him. God, she was human, burning human! To have her strength for part of his, her laughter, her faith, her song. To sit in the sunshine of her life. To forget the damp and chill and fearsomeness of his own. . . . The warmth of her, oh, the warmth of her! . . . Must he shiver in his loneliness forever, in the grayness of his own old purposeless world?

She jumped down from the rock and curtsied joyous at his feet. “And adventure number one for Mr. Thomas Hatch will be—”

For the first time in his thirty-eight years Thomas Hatch

failed to weigh an action with minute care. He threw his arms around Jenny Lamar, fairly crushing the breath out of her, and for the first time in thirty-eight years, kissed a woman upon her lips, the kiss of a lover.

Jenny pushed herself away when she had collected her wits enough, and looked at him, mussed and amazed.

"Thomas Hatch, have you lost your mind?"

He held her hands. "No, no, . . . Jenny, let me love you! That kiss. . . . Just to be with you, to feel your love of life . . . it begins to make my whole world over. . . . You can never know how different everything has seemed since you came. . . . I never let myself guess for a moment that I loved you. . . . Only now, suddenly, it all came over me. . . . I love you—so much."

As if kissing her once had not startled himself and Jenny enough, he suddenly drew her to him again and kissed her eyes, her hair, again and again her lips.

And just as suddenly she was not there. A dash of blue running through the woods and out again into the grass and sunshine—like some dream she was gone. Thomas Hatch fell on his knees and clasped his hands on the rock where she had stood, and bent his head. It was as if he was no longer Thomas Hatch, so changed was his world of yesterday.

As for Jenny Lamar—out of breath she dashed into her own home, up into her own room with her one little bed. . . . Where was her world of yesterday?

Was it because she had spoken jokingly of the gods that every one of them deserted her? No, she knew,—down in her heart she knew. She had stood on that rock and had

flung out her arms and had cried, "Soon I shall be whole, whole, whole!"

That was what the gods—those old, old-fashioned gods of hundreds of thousands of years, had heard. At last she had felt herself so confident, so strong, so able to bear any burden put upon her shoulders. The wound was no longer raw. It still bled at times. Some sudden memory, or sight, or sound,—the cut would open, and it took all her strength to go on. For the most part there was a dull underlying ache, an incompleteness about everything. The torture of evenings was quieted by no end of work. She found odd typing jobs to keep her busy every spare moment she could rescue from other duties,—never a second was she idle. There were neighborhood and school gatherings she gratefully participated in. Sundays—Sundays there were the trips with the boys. Not at first. It was too much like the old days. Only just recently had she been able to put work aside Sundays and venture forth picnic fashion. Then they discovered the river twenty miles away. . . . She had painted those week ends somewhat too glowingly to Thomas Hatch. She really wanted him along because it was so terribly lonely with just the boys. It would be much more fun with a man along. . . . How much more fun everything in the world was with a man along! . . . Until suddenly, this day, talking of Adventure, feeling the old thrill, up on the rock like that, the breeze in her hair. . . . Suddenly she felt so strong again,—as if there were nothing she could not do—alone. Such great things she would accomplish in the world,—she, Jenny Lamar! She almost had cried, "*Now* I am whole, whole, whole!" That would

not have been quite honest. But she was so sure of herself, on that rock.

Those old, old gods of a hundred thousand years and more. . . . They heard her, they saw her outstretched arms. They were so much older than the new gods, so much more powerful, so much more entrenched. 'It was never in their scheme of things that a woman was meant for anything on earth but a man—and babies. When the new gods saw and heard their pet, Jenny—they were watching, too—oh, how they rejoiced! They were so happy in heaven, so encouraged, so—yes, like Jenny—so confident! . . . There were many more older gods.

If Jenny had only jumped to the other side of the rock, and had run on down through the woods and fields. . . .

But no, she jumped right at the feet of Thomas Hatch. The new upright intelligent gods fought for her—they would show the old gods through Jenny what could be done in this world.

Thomas Hatch had kissed Jenny Lamar,—kissed and kissed her. The new gods cried, "We've won, anyhow! See—it is as if Thomas Hatch kissed a wooden image, as far as Jenny Lamar is concerned!"

The old, old gods never give up. By the time Jenny had reached her room they had won out.

She lay on her bed and shook and cried, and cried and shook, and the soul and body of her throbbed and burned, and throbbed and burned again. Bit by bit her strong, confident, ambitious world crumbled about her ears. She lay there—that proud, buoyant thing who had called from

the rock, "I, Jenny Lamar!"—she lay there a woman of hundreds of thousands of years, who hungered with the hunger of hundreds of thousands of years for the physical love of a man. That, and only that, in all the great new world.

CHAPTER X

I

SHE could give up her job. . . . No. It wasn't much of a job, as jobs went. It was a start. She had made good, acquired confidence in herself. But she would not give up her job. It was too much fun bossing things around; molding affairs, even though they were small affairs, to suit; watching a man change under her very eyes. What in the world was more satisfying than seeing a person alter his ways and thought, a little here, a little there, and knowing right well who was responsible? To build faith where there was none. To turn fear into confidence and courage, hopelessness into ambition. To take oversensitiveness, and make out of it valuable indifference. To fashion competence itself from doubt. . . . It was slow work. A week at a time—there was scant improvement. But compare this month with last month!

Yet how in the world could she go on under the circumstances? She had tried it three days, and what an upheaval! The world seemed rather full of stories of men who fell in love with their secretaries. Jenny wished she could collect a few of the secretaries and ask them how they managed. Perhaps most of them didn't manage. Certainly she wasn't managing. Why hadn't the gods made her of stone? or paper pulp—or sawdust—or anything but ma-

terial which felt a good deal like the pictures of "Storm on the New England Coast,"—only the waves were hot, instead of cold. Nor was there anything very New Englandy about her feelings, either.

What a surprising thing the world could be! One day to feel, as far as there was any feel to it, as if you were made of—sawdust, and the next, literally the next, to have the sawdust catch fire. Storm on the New England Coast—burning sawdust. . . . Well, it was just about that mixed.

Imagine a mixture of Storm on the New England Coast and Burning Sawdust typing faultlessly:

"Messrs. Strowbridge and Saxon,
727 Arch Street,
Peoria, Maine.

"GENTLEMEN:—

"In your last shipment of text books for. . . ."

Waves booming, hot, hot sawdust . . . spray, smoke. . . .

"second year History—"

He ought to be back by now. The very idea of having a door open bringing on such a fresh onslaught of breakers against a rock-bound shore. (Ha, rock-bound!—Sawdust-bound.) If he'd only come in and get seated, then the door could open a hundred times without causing a ruffle.

. . . Goodness, "second year History,"—where's the eraser? Second year latin. . . . Look at that,—small "l." Now the whole page looked too mussed. . . . Just as well

to begin over. Carbon paper was turned the wrong way.
. . . Breakers. . . . Sawdust. . . .

At last, here he was!

She would have to give up her job. Look at the way he sat there. He had already read that letter four times, and it was absolutely unimportant to begin with. Every time she looked up from Messrs. Strowbridge and Saxon, he was looking at her. He ought to look away again quickly, and not keep on looking and looking. It made a New England Coast storm seem calm in comparison with how his looking that way caused her to feel inside. . . . Of course she made mistakes. Why couldn't Strowbridge and Saxon have sent the right order in the first place? Why did she have to look at him that way to see if he was still looking at her? Why didn't he get to work?

"I can't work this minute. It's so wonderful to be in love. Do you know what? I feel as if I could fight the whole world single-handed. Watch me at that board meeting to-night! We'll have a new physics teacher next semester,—what do you say?"

"I say we shall, of course."

And when she laid the Strowbridge and Saxon letter on his desk to sign, he caught both her hands and kissed them, which Jenny Lamar liked very much.

Waves—New England Coast . . . ?

Waves—sawdust.

"Mother, why don't you eat more lunch?"

"I'm not hungry, my beloved son."

"Ho-ho! What did you eat between meals?"

"Ho-ho, nothing! Honest to goodness. I'm just thinking."

"Gee, I can think and eat at the same time. I bet I can do anything in the world and eat at the same time!"

"Mother, our teacher acted so funny in school this morning."

"Do tell."

"What do you know,—the *teacher* she spelt *four* words wrong on the blackboard to-day!"

"Not really!"

"And once she sat there and Alec asked her a question three times and she just looked out the window."

". . . I just asked her could I have a lend of her eraser. I asked her three times!"

". . . And then suddenly she said, 'No, no!'

". . . And I says, 'Well, whose eraser will I get a lend of?' And she says, 'Whose what?' And I said, 'Eraser,' and she said, 'Why, use mine!' She's nutty, I say."

Waves . . . sawdust . . . New England Coast. . . .

"Be sure you give Miss Beatty my love when you get back to school. I've not seen her now for several weeks. Don't forget. I'm very fond of Miss Beatty."

So Miss Beatty had troubles of her own.

The entire afternoon was one turmoil. Everything she touched she made a mess of. He would leave the office at four and then she would stay on and work, and really get things done. She told the boys when they called for her as usual that she couldn't go home yet,—there was too much to do. Each acquired a typewriter ribbon spool and

went on his way rejoicing. . . . Five minutes to four,—if only he would bestir himself and go. It was utterly impossible for her to work with him sitting there. If he looked at her she got all upset. If he did not look at her she got all upset. She wished he would lock the door and take her in his arms and—yes, KISS HER. Couldn't she even admit it to herself?

“Messrs. Strowbridge and Saxon,
727 Arch Street,
Peoria, Maine.

“GENTLEMEN:—

“In regard to the last shipment . . .”

Good gracious, she had written that letter twice already. Thomas Hatch made her *sick*. Why did he go to work and mix himself up this way in her peaceful life? She hadn't wanted him one little bit. . . .

“Are you going to work all afternoon, Jenny?”

He came over and laid a hand gently on her shoulder. Surging Waves. . . .

“I am. . . .” New England Coast.

“Jenny, Jenny,—I love to say your name so— Come take a walk again with me this afternoon. It puts the breath of life itself into me to be with you. Come!”

Sawdust. . . .

She put on her hat and they went out. She did not even think to take the third Strowbridge and Saxon letter out of the machine and close it up.

She had not wanted him one single little bit—and just look. . . .

Another month went by.

Since she seemed to lack the moral strength to say what she wanted to say, at last she decided to write it.

“DEAR THOMAS HATCH:—

“This is a most difficult letter to write.

“I can’t stand things going on this way any more. Goodness knows I wish I had never taken that first walk with you the afternoon when you kissed me. Everything was progressing wonderfully with me up till then. I was getting ahead every day, and feeling always so peaceful and sort of independent of the world. Since that afternoon everything has gone topsy-turvy. I can’t work. I can’t sleep. I can’t eat. Some loves would be worth that, but not yours and mine.

“Because you love the way you do most other things,—or the way you used to do them. I could give you confidence and send you ahead with flying colors if it were only some one else you were in love with. But certainly I’d feel foolishness itself urging you on to keep up your courage and love me myself more! Never that!

“I hate half-baked things, and this whole affair is half-baked. What is it all about, anyway? Certainly you and I would never marry each other. I should never marry anybody again, even if you ever got to the point of wanting to marry me. As far as my end of it goes, I was starved to death for some one to love, and for some one to love me—just plain old-fashioned *love*—*starving* for it, and didn’t know it until you came along.

“Why couldn’t you have left me in my comfortable state? Even starving is entirely comfortable, if you have no idea you’re starving. And I hadn’t the ghost of an idea. You made me conscious of it that afternoon. You made me know I was starving. And then you dole out little morsels here and there and leave me to curse my fate that you ever

came into my life at all. For the only kind of love I want—the only kind which wouldn't leave me more miserable than before—is—oh, it's such worlds more than you seem to have the slightest idea about!

“So I'd rather you gave me none at all. Which is why I write this letter. You love me just enough to keep me continually stirred up. In the state my soul found me in after that afternoon, it seems physically impossible for me to be indifferent. I can't, though I try day and night, find a way to protect myself against myself. So I ask you to rescue me,—by ceasing to love me. The way you love—it won't be very hard to stop. I don't mean that cruelly. But it really is so, isn't it?

“This loving business! To bring it down to the sort of thing between you and me. It makes me ache all over. That loving should ever be lukewarm! You see, I don't believe I could ever love a man more than he loves me,—something inside of me rears up at the very idea. So that by your lukewarm loving, you force me to love lukewarm in return, and I am outraged in all directions. I, who love loving so,—I hate this! And above all, I hate my own weakness. How I have sunk in my own estimation! You have no idea. I start out each day saying I will have none of him! When you open the door in the morning my whole soul and body get mixed up and on end. I want to rush to you! . . . We go walking. Everything in me is one wild anticipation, hunger. We come back after two hours. You have sat under a tree and looked at me—looked and looked and looked. You have told me that I am the most wonderful person in all the world. You slip a flower I give you into your pocketbook—to keep forever. And I want to *love!* I want to *be loved!* I come back as starving, as unsatisfied, as I started out,—worse, indeed, for just having been near you and the agony of unending possibilities you never take advantage of.

“So you see—I'm not the sort for you to be loving at all—you want an entirely different kind. And I—oh, I want very much to have you stop loving me. If you'd just give up the whole idea, I know it would be no time before

my world would be all peaceful again. . . . There are such thousands of things I want to be doing! I can do none of them when my insides feel like this. . . . I can't even be a good secretary. I really wish to be a help,—it would all be so comfortable and nice once more. We could even go on the fishing trip some week end, perhaps, after all.

"Please, I'm not really worth your caring about anyhow. You see, I had no idea I'd ever be like this, myself. Evidently people know very little about themselves—except in retrospect. Certainly I shall never be boastful of myself in advance, ever!

"Remember, you are just to glare at me, and growl, and grunt. Please!

"Your hoping-to-cool-and-solidify-again secretary,
"JENNY L."

My, what a relief. That was done and over with. More than a month of a mess. She hated herself—hated, hated, hated herself. . . . After all, it would have been much kinder of the gods, when they were designing females, to have supplied some sort of automatic adjustment which would mean that when you suddenly found yourself forced to live without a man, you would, at least in time, find it an eminently satisfying and comforting and stabilizing state of affairs—indefinitely.

There was so much, so much to be done in the world.

Jenny laid the letter on Thomas Hatch's desk the next morning. She went to the basement after new supplies. When she came back the office was still empty. The letter was gone. Over on her desk was an envelope addressed to her in Thomas Hatch's handwriting. He had read her letter. He was called out of town very suddenly by a tele-

gram from his mother. His father was dying. He might have to be gone several days. It was a great relief to know she could manage all the office details in his absence. She was to call on the assistant principal if any matter needing his attention came up. Sincerely, T. H.

More things for Thomas Hatch to have on his mind. She did hope her letter had not hurt him—on top of that telegram. What a pity she had written it just when she did. Thinking of her might have helped him over the crisis of the next few days.

At least she would have a short spell in which to find herself again, to get on her feet again, solid.

She had not realized how perpetually near to smiling his face had grown in the last month until she saw him for the first time on his return. For, you see, it was something more than the death of his father. Some folks dream dreams from youth on, and accustom themselves to seeing them fade—or become shattered. When a man dreams the first big dream of all his life at thirty-eight, and when it was so extremely difficult to get into a state of mind where one could dream at all, and when the dream itself was perhaps the most wonderful dream in the world—how fearfully, fearfully gray the world can look when it is all over! Possibly really no grayer than before the dream ever started, but so very gray. Here and there really black!—after the dream. When it was so difficult to dream at thirty-eight, and so—so useless, perhaps one never dreams again.

3

Three months later.

Really it should have been only two months later. One solid month had Jenny's mind been firmly made up. Every morning when she dressed she said, "To-day I shall tell him." But every morning his face wore that tired look, and she could not bear the thought of causing him any more pain. This morning, this morning, she would not look at his face. So when the door closed, and by the way it closed she knew it was Thomas Hatch, she looked hard at the typewriter and said:

"I'm leaving at the end of the month."

No sound. Was he in the room?

"I'm leaving at the end of the month."

She looked up at last. All she could see was his back.

"I've found a very fine secretary to take my place. She'll—she'll be a much better secretary than I am. She'll be—impersonal."

Not a word the whole morning long. At noon time he went out first.

That same day at lunch.

"Mother, are you sick?"

"No,—why?"

"Your face. . . . Why don't you smile? . . . That's better!"

"Mother, we gotta new teacher!"

"Guess what? Miss Beatty's gonna get married!"

"Ho-ho,—I knew that for two whole months!"

"How did you know, mother?"

"Miss Beatty came around one evening and told me all about it and I told her all about it and she brought the man around to see me a few nights later because she'd followed my advice, so he was very nice to me, and she was very nice to me, and we're all to be at the wedding."

". . . Mother, Miss Beatty'll have a baby now soon, won't she?"

"Miss Beatty hopes so, so I hope so too."

"Will she bring it to school to show us?"

"Maybe she will!"

"Wouldn't it be funny, though, if our dog had puppies and Miss Beatty had a baby all at the same time? . . . I sure hope the dog has more puppies than Miss Beatty has babies. I wouldn't think much of a dog that had only *one* puppy, would you, mother?"

"Well, it ud be better than a lady having five babies, wouldn't it, mother?"

". . . It'll be nice for Miss Beatty to have a man around the house, don't you say, mother?"

"Yes, very nice."

"Sometimes I think it ud be awfully nice having a man around our house again. What do you say, mother?"

"I—perhaps it—would."

That afternoon affairs in the office of Thomas Hatch went on as usual. By four o'clock it got on Jenny's nerves.

"Did you hear me say I was leaving the end of the month?"

"Yes, I heard you."

"I'm leaving town."

"You mean—you're going away?"

"Yes. I want to start in some place all new—absolutely new. If I stayed here, every time I saw you on the street or at some one's party, all the wretchedness of the past months would come back to me. You see, it would keep me reminded of the fact that I'm a woman. I'd like to feel as—as sexless as possible. It isn't that I want to feel like a man—oh, never, never! But—well, the truth of the whole matter is, I don't want to *feel* at all. I was in that comfortable state six months ago."

"I see. Yes, that would be a very comfortable state to be in, not to feel—at all."

"You know, I have something of a dramatic streak in me. I don't like to leave a situation without some sort of fitting end to it. You've played a tremendous part in my life the last months. Just before we move away—I've promised the boys—we're to have a last week end at the river. Please come along! It would give us both a wonderful last memory. After that we shall never see each other again, never write each other. The ups and downs of especially the last three months we'll forget—the hurts I've caused you, the vacillations, the resolves, the backslidings. We'll think of a last two days and a night by a starlit river—and the rest. . . . No, there will have been no 'rest.' Just the river, a beautiful memory of the river. . . ."

"I don't know . . ."

"I never saw a man so scared to do something that might give him some happiness in this life! Not once in all these

months did I ever suggest our doing something together that you didn't say, 'I don't know . . .' in that way of yours. Are you afraid even to be happy?"

"Yes, I guess that's it. I'm afraid even to be happy."

"But you are going to the river! When I make up my mind to a thing this hard—just give up right now! Two weeks from to-morrow. Good-by! . . . Don't bother about the sleeping bag—I borrowed one for you. No need to give Agnes heart failure. . . . Don't bring Agnes. . . . Good-by!"

PART III

CHAPTER XI

I

OH, those souls in the world, those souls to whom the thought of a camp fire means nothing. . . . Who that has ever known the smell of frying bacon in the woods, the taste of flapjacks in the woods, the sound of a stream at night, the sight of the stars through the trees,—who that has ever known any of that would exchange those memories for all the gold of Midas?

Clear the space for the blankets and the sleeping bags, here under those fir trees where the needles are softest. Hunt around and collect wood for the fire, a plenty of every kind, before it gets dark,—the little dry twigs for the start, middle size for cooking, small logs for the camp fire after supper. Here are big stones for the oven—what a broiling we'll have! There's the steak for to-night; trout—we hope trout for breakfast! . . . How about trying one's luck all alone right now—dusk? No time like it. . . . Where did I put those little brown fellows?—that's the fly for me—and a couple of extra leaders. Throw over the wading boots—there's the basket, hanging on the limb of that oak. . . . So-long, don't wait supper for me. If the luck is any good at all I won't be back before dark. . . .

Up stream? Down stream? There was that wonder of a big riffle we passed about a quarter of a mile up. Fish

up to that. . . . No, it might be too late. Take the path up to the Big Riffle and fish down with any time left. Don't put the rod together till we get to the Big Riffle. . . .

Oh, I say, who could let a hole like that go by? It won't take a second to get the rod out—just this one hole on the way. . . . The sound of the reel—what music in all the world like the sound of the reel! . . . There now, wade out behind that rock for shelter—cast just over to the right and let her float on down to that dark eddy near the opposite bank. Look out for the brush behind! No need to get so excited,—if there's a trout in that hole he'll hear your heart beating all this distance. . . . One cast—ach, a little too far this way. Give yourself about three feet more line. . . . Pretty one! There she is now, right over the spot where the Big Boy's waiting—if he's waiting at all. . . . Plump! Hey—missed it! Jove, did you hear his teeth snap, almost? That big he was. Did you catch that shine along the side as he flipped his tail? Oh, say, I'm shaking all over. . . . If you can do it just that way again. You didn't prick him,—he's as good as if the hole had never been tried before. Spoil the water this time, and you've lost him. . . . There—pretty one again—landed as gently as a fly dropping off a leaf. . . . There he's waiting—he'll make sure he snaps it this time. . . . Plump!—Heigh, see the curve of the rod, hear the reel, the reel, the reel!

How a heart can beat! Ach, there he's making for the rapids—and a gossamer leader. Never mind—follow on down and lead him off into that quiet water by the pebbly

beach and the old log. Look out—no telling what old branches may be down under the water. He's not there yet. . . . Hey, watch him take up stream, will you? Pull in the line with your hands—no time to reel. . . . There, take up the line now—he's jerking over by the shallow side. . . . Down stream—there goes the line out again. Go on down with him! You've not got such yards of line left. . . . Watch out for that bank there—looks as if there might be no end of snags—out this way, old boy, out—this—way! . . . If you could just know where you hooked him, just how well the hook's holding, just how true that gossamer leader is. . . . Hey there—you almost gave him some slack! . . . Now's your chance—over by that beach. . . . He's getting tired, I say,—look at him! . . . Why didn't you bring a net? Who would have guessed they came that big in this stream! . . . The beach doesn't look safe, either. . . . No, get him worn out and then—look at him, right at your feet! Oh, the beauty! The gills panting, panting. Run your hand like lightning along his back—quick! thumb and second finger tight in at his gills. . . .

I've got him, I've got him, I've got him! You beauty! You glorious thing! Was there ever such a trout! Flap your poor old tail—I've got a grip on that head nothing in all creation could loosen. . . . Just the same, it's a good safe feeling to get him up on dry land—over by that low brush and those rocks—it's fairly clean, and it's safe. Put him down on the grass. . . . I say, did you *ever* see such a beauty! Look at the markings of him! Poor old boy—you're done for. No good to flop. Poor old tired flops. . . . There—you're out of your misery now. . . . Hate to

put him in the basket—want to kneel there and look at him till dark. . . . A few ferns in first. See how his head and tail curl up—he won't fit in that basket! Wipe your hands off in the grass and ferns, and the rest on your khaki trousers. . . . You can't go up to the Big Riffle—you'll just have to get back to camp and tell them about him, the Beauty curled up in the basket. He's enough for a breakfast pretty near, all by himself. To-morrow morning early—that will be the time to try the Big Riffle. Rather dark now, anyway—really ought to get back and see if there is anything you can help with around the camp—yes, yes, of course. . . .

“Any luck?”

“Close your eyes!”

For sale? No, not one fin of that trout, not one second of that delirious time, are for sale. Not all the money in the whole United States could buy one single thrill of it. That—*that* is living for you!

“It makes your hands smell rather funny, doesn't it?”

“Funny? Funny? That's *trout*!”

“Was it really fun?”

“Oh, Thomas Hatch, Thomas Hatch. . . . Well, now we'll get supper.”

“Mother, look,—Alec's got two water snakes!”

“And Steve's got four little frogs!”

“And lookit—all these new kinds of flowers we've not seen before!”

“And Mr. Hatch got in the nettles!”

“That's why we brought Mr. Hatch along,—to teach him not to fall into nettles twice. . . .”

" . . . The potatoes are 'most done, mother. . . . Ooh, look at that fire for broiling!"

" . . . I say, mother, we forgot the plates."

"Mr. Thomas Hatch looks to Mrs. Jenny Lamar as if we ought to go back and get some!"

"Well, but what *do* you do when you forget plates?"

"Eat off of something else. Camping with the Lamars educates for resourcefulness. We always forget something, and we always discover it never makes a bit of difference. You, being company, can eat out of the frying pan,—put some fern leaves down on your lap first—it's probably none too clean underneath. . . . You begin to see why I didn't hunger to bring sister Agnes along. If you look like that when we forget a little thing like plates, what would be sister Agnes' expression? Steve can eat out of the top to the potato pot; Alec—"

"Mother, look,—I found this big flat stone. Isn't it just perfect for a plate?"

"And I'll—eat off another stone. . . . And Agnes is comfortably at home eating off of warm china. . . . Smell that steak! . . . I say, do you know what you do when smoke from a camp fire gets in your eyes? You move. . . . You know, you do look like a martyr. *Smile!*"

"It wasn't the smoke, really. I was just thinking."

"Wondering, I'll wager, how long it would take a person of your age to be converted to camping, is that it?"

"Yes, in part. It isn't that I don't like it, you know. It's just—it keeps surprising me so all the time. All day I've found myself wondering what's coming next."

"Oh, but don't think that is necessarily camping. That's

just Lamars. I don't suppose we'll ever learn to do things so that well-brought-up people wouldn't be surprised. Don't grow discouraged over camping just because your first experience is with us. I'm sure it must be very different with circumspect people. But you see I never camped with anybody but Lamars, so I'm handicapped. . . . It's dreadful how used you get to the way your own family does things. Especially dreadful when I think how used you are to Agnes."

"Agnes isn't so bad."

"That's because you're used to her. That's the terrible part. You don't see that for Agnes to run your house the way she does, it has taken all there is of Agnes for—how long? She's forty. She lives, moves, and has her being for the elimination of dust. Suns rise and set according to the amount of the gas bill. The moon alters its course if there is a spot on the table cloth. An innocent spider builds a web,—it takes a year off of Agnes' span of life. The cream dressing for the salmon isn't quite thick enough. Agnes is mortified to the point of collapse at the table. Did every mattress not get turned and aired and beaten and brushed every day, Agnes would rend the very skies in desperation and probably insist on standing up all night. . . . I can just tell you that long ago the gods washed their hands of Agnes. Not even the most old-fashioned gods in heaven ever meant women to keep house like Agnes. No wonder they get discouraged over women. They don't suit any gods, the kind like Agnes. There are some gods who are just concerned over women having husbands and babies. They hate such careful housekeepers because it makes

wives pernickety and nervous and mothers impatient and tired. . . . Other gods, who have faith that perhaps there are things of value women could be doing in the world—in addition to husbands and babies, or as substitutes for some unavoidable absence of them—those gods get out of sorts with such women, because they give all their time to pottering about a house and no one in all the world is any better off for their pottering. . . . I really think gods hate waste more than anything else in all creation. I would, if I were a god. Wasted material, wasted time, wasted effort, wasted opportunities.”

The stones were rolled back a bit, the logs were catching and snapping, the smoke, in the still of early night, going straight up through the branches of the pines.

“I’m going to bring up my boys with the idea of one cardinal sin, and one only. One Absolute Wrong, if you will. The sin of not making the most of every single chance you get in the world. Wasted opportunities,—how they break the hearts of the gods! They can forgive anything and everything but that. . . . And yet, perhaps, to Agnes, it is a wasted opportunity if she lets a spider web alone half an hour—or forever. Her gods would never forgive that! And how utterly, utterly miserable Agnes would be by a camp fire this way, out in the open, in the dark, lying flat on her stomach on the good, leafy, grassy earth, her chin in her hands, philosophizing. . . . I guess there are no Absolutes . . . except mine—for me.”

Jenny told the boys stories and tucked them away in their sleeping bags where they could see the fire and the beautiful light on the beautiful trees. . . . “Mother, the

world is so wonderful, isn't it? And there never was any one in all the world that has so many things to be glad about, was there? I just don't think I could have made a nicer world if I'd done it all myself, except . . . except for Pop not being here. Isn't that what you say, mother?"

2

"And now, like this by the burning logs, with the boys in bed and done their questionings, and the fact you didn't have plates to eat off of forgotten, and in the dark, so you can't see the dirt,—just a fire and trees and stillness—aren't you really glad you came? Isn't this a fitting way to end a—a friendship? Or are you still possessed of the idea that some one knows we're here who won't understand?"

"No, I don't much care right now if some one does misunderstand. . . . A wild feeling comes over me and I rebel at the thought of this being—the end."

"Don't waste a moment of this wonderful night rebelling. It is the end. Just enjoy it all, every second, and have it always to look back upon and be grateful for. . . . There's much in our relationship I can't be grateful for,—and yet perhaps it had to come, and I should be glad it's part of my past, rather than looming ahead in the future. Since I am what I am, it is just as well I know it. Yet it is hard to be grateful for being 'shown up.' I hate the idea that a man can throw me into such a turmoil. I never would have guessed it in all the world."

"But, Jenny, why, if I could throw you into such a tur-

moil—what was that, perhaps, but being in love? And if you were in love with me, why does this have to be the end?”

“In the first place, perhaps the most important lesson you taught me was that being in a turmoil doesn’t necessarily mean at all that one is in love. That is worth \$3,000,000 to me! Do you know, sometimes I think that if you had proposed to me any time the first or second week after—after you kissed me that first time, I’d have accepted you and married you on the spot—in the full belief that the turmoil was love. I quake when I think of how many people propose and how many proposals get accepted, because turmoils and love, real love, get confused with each other. You see, the only time I ever fell in love, I fell in love first, and the turmoils really came later. . . . I didn’t know you could have turmoils without being in love. I don’t believe you can really be in love without having turmoils. Only, when you fall in love young, you’re as in love as you can be, being young. But the turmoil part in you—well, it just doesn’t seem to be awake. That is, really very, very much awake.”

“You mean that if I had asked you to marry me those first weeks—”

“Don’t get the least excited over it—it would have been terrible, terrible. For with my head—oh, I wasn’t one bit in love with you with my head. . . . I wonder how long people can go without realizing the head part of them is not in love. That is the awful danger. While the turmoils—the hunger of part of you—are so great, you can’t see clearly with your mind—it’s as if everything got mixed and be-

fogged. Perhaps, if the physical gets enough satisfaction, it can beguile the soul into believing it is satisfied, too—for a while. But in our case—the flesh, oh, the flesh found such scant gratification for its hunger and thirst. The soul finally managed to stand on one side and ask, ‘What manner of man is this who is causing you such unsatisfied anguish?’ . . . The worst of it was, that even after the soul of me saw clearly, the turmoil kept up. I understand so much about the world that I never understood before. I thank you for that!”

“You see, Jenny, I never could understand what it was all about,—your wanting more love than I gave you. I gave you all the love I could.”

“That was what my soul told me when I looked at you with clear eyes.”

“But it—was—a very great deal. You don’t understand. It was just that—I don’t know—this *expressing* of love—I can’t do that. I felt as if I’d gone so very far, as it was. I just couldn’t, can’t, be different. There are a hundred things that hold me back from—from kissing you oftener, say. One of them was that—I don’t know—it always seemed to me that expressing love cheapened it.”

“Perhaps you’re right, for you. I’m not saying for a minute that the way I was created is superior to the way you were created. The point is, how tragically terrible when people who love the way you love and people who love the way I love get—mixed—in the mating. A Protestant marries a Catholic, a Jew a Gentile, a conservative a radical. Mere superficialities of difference exist in such marriages compared to what happens when a demonstrative

person marries an undemonstrative person. The gods hurl themselves on their faces and weep—more than weep—sob. For one of the two, life will be a tragedy. If the demonstrative person continues being demonstrative, it would probably be a tragedy for both.”

“But why, why do you feel love has to be expressed? Why can’t it be even so strong if I—if the man—never kisses you—her—the other person at all?”

“It can be every bit as strong. Perhaps, for all I know, stronger. I suppose there are men who love their wives devotedly and begin their letters ‘Friend Wife.’ When such a husband meets his wife after a three months’ parting he shakes hands with her. If the wife might some day whimper that she’d like a kiss once in a while, would like once in a while to be told ‘I love you,’ her stalwart husband would assure her: ‘But, Agatha, I kissed you that night we got married, remember? And I told you eleven years ago that time that I loved you, remember? I love you just as much now as I did then, so there is no need my bringing up the subject again.’ . . . Suppose, just suppose I married that kind! The Lord have mercy on my soul—and his.”

More logs on the fire. The sparks and smoke curled upwards through the high branches of the trees. Jenny turned on her back to watch them for a spell. The light of a fire on trees at night. . . .

“But, Jenny, why would you need to keep telling a person you loved them, and wanting to be kissed? I still don’t understand.”

“I would need to keep telling a person that I loved them and wanting to be kissed because I was born that

way, that's all. And you never will understand because you were born another way. You would be as unhappy with me as I with you. You say expressing love cheapens it. If you feel that way—then you feel that way. To me they are not two separate things, loving, and expressing love. They are both part and parcel of the same thing. The outward manifestations of love are an inseparable part of love itself, interwoven through and through the very texture of devotion. Keep me from expressing my love, and my love itself suffers. They just aren't two separate things."

"You wouldn't do very well married to a Dante, would you, Jenny? What about the Dantes?"

"Yes, for all I know, the Dantes of the world—those who clasp one hand over the heart and pass on, but with love burning forever for their Beatrices—perhaps they are the really great lovers. Lead me to no Dantes. Active loving, active being loved—ah, it is the breath of life itself to me!" She sat cross-legged, gazing into the fire, musing.

"And I don't mean just between man and woman, either, though that is far and away the most beautiful love of all—more beautiful, I think, than between mother and child. I just—I just love—loving *everybody*! It is only my realization of the necessity of conforming in a civilized world to civilized standards which keeps me from embracing most of creation. In my heart, when I do the morning marketing, I figuratively throw my arms about the egg lady and the German butcher and the girl who sells hooks and eyes. I *love* people. I just *love* them. When it comes to my own friends though, really I never make a fuss over any of them, really. I've trained myself not to, except Christ-

mases or birthdays, or after long absences, or—well, when there's a *very* good excuse. . . . But with a husband—no, no, no, I would not be contained! If I loved a man enough to marry him I should have to feel I could show him so in a hundred and one odd ways every day and night. Loving, loving is part and parcel of *love*. Every expression of love adds just so much to love itself. Discourage me from the expression of my love, and you discourage the very existence of my love.”

Thomas Hatch said nothing.

“I know what you're thinking, and you are right, Thomas Hatch. You're saying to yourself, ‘What a wearisome, an annoying, nature, indeed, ever to be cooped up with under one roof.’ I would be that to you—perhaps to every one in the world. Perhaps I married the one man in all creation who could absorb joyfully all the love I had to give, and who could give back that much, if not a bit more, in return. . . . Do you understand then, for that reason, if for no other, how very necessary it is for you and me to call an end to all of this? Wherever could it lead but to more misery for both of us?”

“It's been all strange to me, Jenny,—the whole thing. From the time I began really to know you at all, you almost scared me a little. It was as if you came from another world, a creature I had never seen or heard of. Sometimes I used to dream that I might see into your world, might come to understand it. I would put out my hand toward you, as it were, and then draw back again, afraid. It was as if I and my world were cold, you and your world warm, living. Then, up there on that rock that day—sud-

denly I lost my fear. I reached out and touched the warmth of you, and I took you in my arms and—lived. Yes, lived. And then the old fear came over me again. Only having felt of that warmth, that life of you once—I couldn't go back altogether to the old cold world you'd little by little drawn me away from anyhow, almost without my knowing. Every time I saw you, it gave me a new faith. Every time I broke the countless chains which seemed to hold me and did take you in my arms, it was as if all at once the sun shone in a dark place. And always, when I was alone again, the fear. I knew, oh, I knew, I could only touch just the fringe of your world, ever. I never really could have come to the point of asking you to marry me, I don't suppose. I dreamt of it nights. I built the castles, knowing all too well they were but dreams. The wonder just dreaming can be. . . . Only, after that letter you wrote, I knew I hadn't the right any more even to dream. . . . It was as if, Jenny, you live in the sunshine, among flowers, and I in a cold gray room—and I can't ever reach your sunshine."

"That's it, Thomas Hatch. Now I know just how it is! I do live in a garden of sunshine and flowers—I see the very garden, and the colors,—the wonderful yellows and reds and blues and greens, and a lake in the distance. That is where I live, that is where I've always lived. . . . Once—once, I was in a cold gray room for a while. It was terrifying. My soul cried out against it, my soul that loves the sunlight so. There's a door in that cold gray room. I found it at last! At first it opened only a crack. But a crack gave me a glimpse of my garden.

After months it opened more, until finally, not long before that walk we took, it opened wide and I stepped out into my garden again, and felt the sun, and smelt the flowers, and heard the birds. Not so bright a sun, not such fragrant flowers, not so many birds, as there used to be—but, oh, how wonderful after that gray room!

“Then you came to the doorway of that, or some other gray room—you saw me in my garden. You caught me by the hand once. It was good to feel the touch of you. At first my soul cried, ‘You shall have company in your garden!’ But I couldn’t draw you out there. And I couldn’t let go of your hand. As the weeks went by, I saw that what would happen was that if we were to keep our hands clasped—and I seemed strangely powerless to let go—it would mean that I might have to go back into a gray room again. You were afraid of my garden. You were afraid to leave the doorway of your gray room. Why, why?”

“Because—because every time I ever left it, from the time I was a little boy, something unhappy always happened to me. Never could I begin to venture forth, to leave my grayness, but something came along to hurt, or to make me ashamed, or to frighten me. I can’t remember it all. Only to know that years ago I said, ‘I’ll crawl back into my gray room and stay there.’”

“Yes, but you did venture forth these last months,—not through the door that led to my Garden, but through other doors. And never once did you meet with anything but success!”

“It was because—because I held your hand as I went,

and forgot what it was to feel afraid. You led the way, you gave me faith. With you, backing me, I made good. I shall never be able to do it again. As soon as you said, 'I'm leaving at the end of the month,' it was as if every door to my gray cold room closed, including the door to your sunlit garden. No, you were the Open Sesame to those other doors. They're locked now, and the keys are—lost."

A strange grim smile came over his face. "Besides, Agnes stands guard over one door, mother over another."

The logs shook down, there were only coals left. A lonely bit of soft spark now and then found its quiet way up towards the trees. Each looked long into the embers. What each saw was what there was there for each to see. Their dreams would never again merge.

"Jenny, you're right. I see now that it is wise for you to move away altogether. A sight of me would only recall the grayness which you have forever escaped; a sight of you—it is a glimpse of sunlight which only makes my room the darker when you've passed."

"And I leave you—to get used to grayness and nothing but grayness? The idea of it breaks my heart! I would have the whole world out in the sun with me!"

"Grayness, and nothing but grayness. . . . It's what a lot of us are used to all our lives. Only we thank our gods that once, at least, to some of us has come a glimpse of sunlight, a breath of warm summer breeze, the sound of laughter and singing. Ah, Jenny, Jenny, I can stand my grayness—my eyes, all of me, are accustomed to that. I shall sink back into it, alas, almost resignedly. . . . Only

that door which opened once into your sunlit garden,"—he stood in the last glow of the firelight and held her hands—"before that door I build a shrine, and there at least, for it will cast no shadow in your sunshine—there you will let me—worship."

And then, because, after all, the door between the sunlit garden and the cold gray room was not as tightly closed as each had thought, he took her in his arms. . . . The door closed gently, each turned a key quietly, he on his side, she on hers. . . . In the morning, as she had hoped, he was gone before she and the boys awoke. On a tree near where the fire had burned the night before was fastened a scrap of yellow paper. On it was written in pencil:

"Alles geben die Götter, die unendlichen,
Ihren Lieblingen ganz;
Alle Freuden, die unendlichen,
Alle Schmerzen, die unendlichen, ganz."

"Good-by, Jenny Lamar, Liebling of the gods, for always."

PART IV

CHAPTER XII

I

THIS time she stood on no rock. It was five-thirty in a deserted office. She flung her arms wide, wide, threw back her head, and called out loud, "I, Jenny Lamar!" She dared the gods to plot against her! Again, as on that rock, well over a year ago, her eyes blazed, her cheeks flushed. Again, she pressed one hand against her lips and blew that kiss to heaven—fire in it, strength in it. "I am indeed whole, whole, whole!" And again, as for so many things in the last months, she called, "Thank You, God!" Because of no special reason—just that she was so very glad she was alive.

She thrust her arms through her coat, jammed her small hat over her dark hair, locked her desk. There was a knock on the door.

"Come in!"

"M's. Lamar?"

"Ho, you Tony! What's the trouble?"

"M's. Lamar, I'd lak to tell you something. You in a hurry?"

"No, no. Sit down here. Smoke a bit—you'll feel more comfortable."

"It's dis way, M's. Lamar. You know that foreman, Luko? Well, he no good man. I try tell Boss last week. I try tell Boss yesterday. He say: 'No time. You go

back to work!’ The men in our department they say we no can work with such a foreman. Some men they lak keel him. He no good. All the time get worse. Three men queet. My fren’ Charlie he an’ me say we queet. Charlie he say, ‘Firs’ you go see M’s. Lamar.’ I say, ‘Why M’s. Lamar?’ He say, ‘Oh, everybody they go see M’s. Lamar.’ ”

They talked long about the no-good-man foreman; they talked about Tony’s wife and babies; they talked about the height of the work stools, about the President of the United States; about prohibition; about Tony’s little dog.

Another knock.

“Come in!”

“Excuse me, madame, you are occupied.”

“No, no, Tony and I were just talking. . . . Good-by, Tony—you come this time to-morrow night. We’ll fix things, you and I. . . . Don’t mention it! And don’t forget to tell the wife to cook the cereal longer—that’s all the trouble. Good-by! . . .

“And what can I do for you?”

“My name is Arovitch.”

“How do you do, Mr. Arovitch, glad to meet you. Sit down.”

“I wish to call your attention to a certain matter. I have tried to get the attention of several authorities but one and all are deaf to my supplications. Three weeks ago my pay envelope was ninety-one cents short. I took the matter to the foreman. He said there was no mistake. That is because the mistake would reflect on his personal in-integ—his personal honor. I tell my fellow workers.

Some say that is the way the boss he makes his money. He keeps a little out every week and it amounts to thousands of dollars—yes, madame, so they say—at the end of the year. I wish to question the boss in person. I cannot believe such reports. But now I am not so sure. To-day, at last, after three weeks and hearing many tales as we sit and eat our lunch, I stop the Boss. He always looked an honest man. I say to him with all the respect of my soul, ‘Sir, pardon me, did you take the ninety-one cents out of my pay envelope?’ Madame, how cruel he did look at me! He called me—oh, madame, how it hurts the heart of a gentleman to say it. He said to me, ‘You fool, what would I want of your ninety-one cents?’ ”

“Mr.—Arovitch, tell me honestly, did Mr. Hutchins say ‘You fool?’ ”

“Well, perhaps not exactly ‘you fool.’ But he meant ‘you fool.’ He said, ‘Man, are you crazy?’ and that is the same. And then I go back and tell my friends.”

“That he said ‘you fool?’ ”

“Well, it was what he meant, madame. And they say, ‘Arovitch, why don’t you quit?’ And I say to myself, always I hear the men say, ‘Well, go and see Mrs. Lamar,’ and so—madame, I am at your service.”

“Who’s your foreman?”

“Schmidt, a gentleman I no longer like since he did not act—wisely—in the matter of my ninety-one cents.”

Another knock.

“You’ll hear about your ninety-one cents at once, Mr. Arovitch. Leave your time cards for that week here with me,—I’ll look the matter up myself.”

"Madame, I thank you! The ladies of America are very gracious!"

Waiting at the door as Mr. Arovitch went out was little Joey. "Now what, Joey?"

"Oh, Miss Lamar, I jus' wanted to tell you—I bin wanting to tell you for three nights, but always there're so many guys waitin' to see you—but we got another baby at our house!"

"Joey!"

"Yes, mam. And, Miss Lamar, we're goin' to name it after you!"

"Joey!"

"Yes, mam. Her name's Lamarine. Ain't it swell?"

"Joey!!"

"Yes, mam. I thought it up all myself. And mom she says to give you her best regards and thanks for everything you sent and Lamarine she's a swell baby!"

Another knock—this time the janitor.

"Hah, Kaiser Wilhelm, you caught me again!"

"Now what you callin' me that new name for?"

"Because I'm so scared of you! You glare at me terribly when you find me in the office cleaning time, and you have no idea how I hate being glared at. Some day the Big Boss will say, 'It's on my mind to raise Mr. Timothy O'Rourke's salary to six thousand dollars a year.' And I shall enter a protest. 'No, he glares at me. Eight dollars and fifty cents a week is all he ought to have!'"

"No, no, now, I don't glare at you. You never seen me glare at you. Why should I be glarin' at the best frien' I got in all the world? But I don't like to make

a dust in your face! There be those it does my heart good to make a dust in the face of them, but not in the face of you!"

Mr. O'Rourke moved a waste basket out into the middle of the floor.

"An' I do want you to know, Mrs. Lamar, if I glare—if I *do* glare, it's 'cause it jus' ain't right your workin' late like this, night after night. It ain't your business *at all* hearin' what a lot o' Dagoes and Jews and Eyetalians an' Swedes and general riff-raff got to complain about. You're Mr. Hutchins' Private Secretary, and none of this is your troubles. He keeps you busy enough without your stayin' late night after night this way. They get comin' worse all the time. . . . I seen six men waitin' outside there when I came along and I sent 'em all about their business!"

"Oh, Tim, you didn't!"

"Yes, I did. 'Tain't right how they plague ye!"

"Don't you ever do that again! . . . Folks have to have some one to tell their troubles to."

"Well, they don't need to tell 'em to you!"

". . . How's Liza, Tim?"

"Oh, Mrs. Lamar, I would so jus' like to talk to you about Liza. I jus' don't know whatever we'll do about Liza. . . . Yesterday she had another of them attacks and I 'most didn't get to work at all to-day. . . . You see, when she gets an attack it's this way. . . ."

Outside, on her way to the stairs, she called out, "You, Jo,—what are you doing here this time of night? The soup'll be cold when you get home!"

"Not much colder'n yours, I'm guessin'. . . . There's a new man here got his machine all in a mess. Damn fool!"

"Joseph! Thou wast a new man once thyself!"

"Yes, an' I was a damn fool then, too."

"Is everybody new one of those?"

"'Most everybody."

". . . How was the meeting last night, Jo?"

"Pretty good. Not many fellas there, but it went so-so."

"Did Pete kick up a fuss, as usual?"

"Sure, Pete he always kicks up a fuss, in meetin's, in the shop—every place. It's a wonder to me why he don't get fired. . . . He sometimes acts to me as if he ud almost like to get fired."

Jenny knew just why Pete wasn't being fired.

"Oh, I say, Jo, how did the party go Wednesday night? Did the wife's cake turn out all right?"

"You jus' bet! That was a swell party. . . . Now what do you know about that! The Missus she done a piece of that cake up and she says, 'You jus' give Mrs. Lamar a taste!' I told her how you says she'd forget the baking powder or somethin'—and there I let it lay all this time in my drawer. I'll fetch it right now."

"Michael! Running the elevator this time of night! What ho?"

"Well, ya don't think I *want* to be runnin' the elevator this time of night, do ya?"

"My goodness, Michael, if you look like that the floor will drop out and we'll land in a heap six stories below."

"'Sall the same to me."

"Now, Michael, stop the elevator right here!"

"What for?"

"Stop it!"

". . . Well, now what?"

"Look me in the eye. . . . Are you sore over having to run the elevator late, or over something that's got nothing on earth to do with elevators?"

"Over runnin' the elevator this hour of the night."

"You're not looking me square in the eye!"

"Well, how does any fella really know honest to Gawd what he's sore about? Everybody's got such a pile of troubles."

"Well, what are yours, for instance?"

"Well, runnin' the elevator late."

"Michael, you were going to be honest to Gawd. . . . You're having a scrap with your wife again!"

"Who told you!"

"You're jealous of that Pole again!"

"Who said I was!"

"And you don't like working late because you want to be home to see what's going on."

"I never said no such thing!"

"Michael, do you know what? . . . (You can go on down now.) They were thinking of putting you on night shift."

"My Gawd!"

"But they won't. It's absolutely settled."

"Oh, Mrs. Lamar—oh, they'll never put me on night shift! I'd never know whether I was runnin' the blame thing up or down for thinkin' of where that Pole might be!"

"Michael, do you know what?"

"What now?"

"I saw the new time sheets. You were down for day shift all right. But some one had changed the Pole to night shift."

"Oh, my Gawd! An' him havin' afternoons free again and all!"

"But he's back on day shift now too, same hours as you."

"Oh, Mrs. Lamar. Oh, I say, there sure is a Gawd in heaven!"

"Good night, Michael. . . . I say, if I were you I'd forget that Pole!"

. . . And yet, worrying over Michael for two blocks, Jenny knew that under the circumstances Poles were difficult to forget.

At the corner where she waited every evening for the car a woman with a shawl around her head and a large basket on her arm stopped as if she would speak, went on a few steps, turned, and came back.

"Jus'—good evenin' to you, mam."

"Good evening!" Jenny shook the strange hand.

"I thought I'd jus' stop and tall you, my John, he good again."

"Oh, oh, yes—of course—you're John's mother! I'm so glad John's well again! Let him come over a week from Sunday and play with Steve and Alec!"

"T'ank you, oh, t'ank you! He come! He stay well

now all time. He eat, drink jus' smart t'ings same Steve, Alec!"

"Good evening, Mr. Conductor!"

"Evenin'! Late again, I see!"

"Guess I'll have to join the union and get overtime!"

". . . 'Member that fat guy had a scrap on the back platform that night?"

"Sure,—don't tell me he had another!"

"Oh, say, you otta bin on the last trip an' a seen that fat guy. I was jus' hopin' somebody'd come along I cud tell 'em about it. Say, he got his at last! He got in a scrap some place, the big Beef Stew, and somebody knocked the very stuffin' clean out of him. His left eye . . . Yes, mam, transfer next corner. . . . His left eye . . . No, take the car with number twenty-two in front. . . ."

"Hello, mother! You're awfully late!"

"Don't I know it! Oh, but I got such heaps and heaps of work done—you never could guess!"

"What then? Tell us all about it!"

"Well, you see, I had to get a lot of reports and papers in order and everything ready for the first of the month. And everything's done! I feel so good! I'm so happy! We celebrate. I've got a wondrous piece of cake here from Mrs. Jo,—you know Jo. So I stopped at the drug store and bought some—"

"Ice cream!"

"So. . . . Now you tell me everything you did all day

and then I'll tell you everything I did all day, and we'll see who was really the busiest."

2

Upstairs that night in bed Jenny lay humming a little tune in the dark. How good it was to be whole again! How very much work one could do when one felt whole! It was fun to get up in the morning, fun to eat breakfast, fun to walk to the car with the boys, fun to get to the office, unlock that desk, and dive into work. What very extra fun work was! . . . That High School job—that did to sort of patch herself together again. How futile and small and boresome so much of education was! How weary one could get of the endless red tape and complaints and economies! It had been interesting, very, working on Thomas Hatch. It would have been interesting, very, to have seen just how far she really could have encouraged him to go in that acquiring of faith in himself. How long would she have had to back him before she could have stepped out and have him still hold fast and go on?

But the factory job,—there was life for you! It had started in routine enough, but such possibilities as she had discovered! Every day was an adventure! There was no telling what problem would turn up. Dear old Mr. Hutchins would raise those white eyebrows of his and say, "Really, Mrs. Lamar, I hardly think that question belongs here for settlement."

"Where will it be settled then?" How often had Jenny asked him that!

"Why, I don't just know. But not here."

"Do you mind if, anyhow, I just see what can be done about it?"

"Why, no, not if there seems no fit department to handle that point. And provided, of course, none of the traditions of the firm are upset."

Dear old Mr. Hutchins. . . . Jenny would have worked her fingers to the bone for him,—indeed she did do almost that. How good he had been to her since that very first morning when she had applied for a job under him at the factory. After a sedate talk he had asked her, "And just how much secretarial work do you expect to be able to handle?"

And Jenny had laughed and said, "Oh, I expect to help you run the factory pretty soon!"

What a soft pleasant laugh he had. . . . "We'll start with dictating letters," he told her, and so she began work the next day.

Always he was so thoughtful, always so kind. She loved Mr. Hutchins, *loved* him! And his dear little quiet wife—she loved her so. How happy it had all been! Never had he acted like a "boss" at all, but like a dear friend. The wonderful times she had had at their house. . . . The dinners, where she wore her very best and only low-necked dress, and found herself next to the nabobs of the town. Wouldn't Billy have loved it! The concerts and theaters she attended with the Hutchinses. The splendid friends she met through them—those same nabobs, who didn't mind at all that she was just a secretary with only one party dress. The concerts and theaters again! The dinners!

What fun, what fun, the whole year had been! Sometimes she sat through a dinner and listened to a lot of peculiar ideas on everything under the sun and when she told them what she thought, they patted her on the back as if she were twenty and called her "naïve." She knew what naïve meant. She wasn't naïve at all. Even so, every one was always cordiality itself. And they were all so good to Steve and Alec. Hadn't these months been joy!

And then all her wonderful friends at the factory. Whoever would have guessed there were so many nice people to know? . . . Mr. and Mrs. Dobbs, for instance. When she ate dinner with the Dobbses, Mr. Dobbs always celebrated by taking a bath. He got home a bit late from the foundry. Not wanting to miss any of the conversation, he used to leave the bathroom door open a foot so that he could still be part of the party and carry on his end of social intercourse going on between Jenny and Mrs. Dobbs in the one room they possessed. If they said anything while he splattered, they had to say it over again when he could hear.

There were Mr. and Mrs. Luko, yes, that very same no-good-man Luko, and little Tony Luko. Such festivities when the Lukos and Lamars got together! Jenny knew what was the matter with Luko now, why he was no-good. Tony had to have the operation after all, and week in, week out, he lay there so weak, in such pain. Luko was up with him a good part of the night, and the worry—his boy they had waited so many years for. My, she must get around again soon—to-morrow. She was sure she could put the matter up to Mr. Hutchins so that he would

understand. Surely he would be willing to lend Luko money for a nurse to help out. Luko would take no charity, that was sure.

And Miss Purly in Department Eleven. What an odd, interesting, cranky piece Miss Purly was! If she didn't find a husband one of these days, Miss Purly would be crankier than ever. It is difficult to find a husband when one is as odd, and as interesting, as Miss Purly, and as well along in years.

And Emanuel with his turbulent ideas, and Mrs. Emanuel—Jenny never could get their last names. She loved to go to those wild meetings with the Emanuels. They were scared to take her at first, believing she might be critical. As if any one oughtn't to know it was nothing to Jenny Lamar what any one thought or said or did. The chairman that first night had glared at her accusingly, and made her feel uncomfortable when in front of everybody he sighed heavily and lamented, "A little of the Bourgeoise will slip in!" Just the same that Scotty, with his teeth all gone, was a good friend of hers now. "I am a Bourgeoise," she told him a few nights later at Emanuel's. "Of course I am. I'm glad I am. But just the same, there ought to be two words, one to express the kind of Bourgeoise I am, and the other, the kind you want to think every one is who refuses to fit into your scheme of things." So they fought for a whole evening, and Jenny learned promptly and at once and for always that the most useless activity in creation is to argue with a person who has no intention on earth of ever changing his mind. She had suspected the truth of that after a dinner one night at the Hutchinses'.

Scotty convinced her for life. It is such a valuable lesson, in this era of conservation of energy, and one worth learning as young as possible. . . . Later she got Scotty a job at the factory,—his wife was sick and things were in a bad way,—but Scotty only stayed two weeks. It went too painfully against his principles to swell the profits of the bloated idle rich, and that was all any worker did in this misguided world. And yet, of course, some of Scotty's ideas were good. It would be impossible for a human being to have as many ideas as Scotty had, and have them all wrong.

And Louisa Isaacs—how hard she did work trying to get the girls in Department Eight to organize! Poor Louisa. . . . She knew there would be at least fifty at the meeting Tuesday night. Wednesday Jenny made a point to pass Louisa's machine. "What luck last night?" Louisa clasped her hands in desperation. Seven present! What *could* one do with a lot of putty? That was all women workers were,—*putty*. All they wanted was *husbands*. *Putty!*

But Mr. Hutchins—after all, he was her pet of everybody. Long since she had to cease telling Mr. Hutchins of her friends outside his circle. One day she had regaled him with the account of a party at Emanuel's. He was in despair. He and Mrs. Hutchins invited her to so many things that week she had no time to call her soul her own. "My dear child, even if you do get fearfully lonely, you must not seek such company as you speak of!"

"Oh, but I love them!" Jenny cried. "It's not that I'm lonely!"

"All the worse, if you love such queer people as these workers!"

If only, *only* Mr. Hutchins would let Jenny tell him some of the things she thought he ought to do in the factory. There were so many details askew, and she, Jenny Lamar, was sure she knew how to fix them. Not alone and single-handed, for two thousand workers,—she wanted to be allowed to let the two thousand help. It was all very well to tell her she could go ahead and find her own solutions, "provided they upset no traditions," but it made for a mass of details and non-coördination, and sooner or later the larger matters found their way back to headquarters.

And always Mr. Hutchins' anxiety,—“I am afraid that if we follow your suggestion it may be setting a dangerous precedent. The firm has never felt called upon before to evolve machinery for the handling of such matters.”

“But the men are getting so discontented! It's so wasteful, discontent!”

“Then let them go some place else and work where they will find more contentment!”

“That is just what they are doing!” Jenny over and over cried in dismay.

Whereupon perhaps he would sit back in his chair and look at the picture of his older brother, his hero, who had founded the business and then died, and left him, Andrew Hutchins, to “carry on” alone, without his inspiration and help. The lines deepened in his handsome face as he slouched down, tired, in the chair that had been his brother's.

“Why do they grow so discontented nowadays, Mrs.

Lamar? Why? Ah, sometimes I am glad Harry was spared all this. In those old days the men were happy enough. They used to stay on years. Their wives used to speak to me on the street. They"—and this Jenny had learned was what hurt most of all—"they used to name their babies after me! I liked that so much. . . . I used to be very fond of the men. Fine, upright, intelligent citizens they were! Now look at them—a lot of foreigners that can't speak a word of English. The Americans we have are a shifty lot,—come and go, come and go. What's the use of doing anything for the men? They don't stay long enough to make it worth while."

It was characteristic of Mr. Hutchins that he always referred to "the men." For ten years now he had had more and more women workers. But his labor mind insisted on functioning back in those days when they hired only men, all Americans, all upright citizens. Every worker of those old days of one hundred employees now looked to the tired memory of Andrew Hutchins like a potential Abraham Lincoln. . . . And they used to name their babies after him. . . . Who of the two thousand workers ever named a baby after him now?

"They don't stay long enough to learn your first name," Jenny told him.

"That's just it!" he frowned. "Why don't they?"

"Because it's too easy finding a more agreeable place to work."

". . . Where do all these foreigners come from?" he asked Jenny impatiently.

When she worked out carefully a plan whereby those

foreigners could become less foreign, could at least learn English and a bit of reading and writing, a plan worked successfully in other plants, she knew, he answered to that scheme, as he answered to practically all her schemes, "But they don't stay long enough to make it worth while." In vain did Jenny promise him on her word of honor as a lady that they would stay longer if only she could work out some of her rosy projects.

Joey should have named the baby "Hutchine"! It would have made the dear man look happy again. . . . Lamarine! Jenny chuckled between the sheets.

But it was inspiring to see how his mind worked on the big factory problems outside of labor. Wasn't it an education to be in with him on those designs, see his grasp of details, and marvel at how he could lay out the whole country in his schemes of production, his plans of distribution. . . . She tried to picture Scotty running the factory—Scotty, who was so sure he could do it better than any one else, he and the Proletariat together. Perhaps the men would not quit any faster under Scotty—but would there be any work for them if they stayed on? . . . Funny old Scotty. He really ought to get some teeth. He could chew his food better, his digestion would be better, and the whole world would look up. Then he could earn a bit of money and his wife would look up. And then she could take better care of Scotty and his world would look up still more. And then he could get a still better job and then get still better teeth and eat still more food and get a still better wife—no job—and—and . . . Jenny was sound asleep.

The next morning Michael told Jenny his wife was sick and wanted to see her awful bad. She left a note on Mr. Hutchins' desk at noon that she might be a few minutes late to work in the afternoon, and found her way to Michael's house. Mrs. Michael—Jenny never could remember any of their queer last names—called from inside. Jenny opened the front door and went in.

A slight pale figure lay on a sofa in a nondescript room. She looked very miserable.

"There now," Jenny smoothed out a pillow under her head, "what can I do for you?"

Mrs. Michael started to cry. It's a way women have. Between her sobs Jenny made out what it was all about—Jenny, who had no moral standards for other people. Mrs. Michael was going to have a baby. She was awful sick. Awful sick. And she was scared to tell Michael.

Why scared to tell Michael? Wouldn't he be that happy?

No, no. M's. Lamar she didn't understand Michael. He would think—think—it was—it was that—sobs and sobs—Pole.

Now, now, Mrs. Michael, maybe no such idea would ever come into his head.

Oh, M's. Lamar she didn't know Michael. It would come into his head first thing. And then—sobs—he'd kill her. And—more sobs—he'd kill the Pole.

And so . . . ?

Well, what M's. Michael she wanted M's. Lamar for, she wanted M's. Lamar, oh, please—and Mrs. Michael's

eyes got very big and pleading—please to tell Michael about the baby. If M's. Lamar was to tell Michael it wasn't the Pole, Michael he'd believe anything in the world M's. Lamar she said. But jus' as soon as M's. Michael she'd say Michael, it ain't that Pole, Michael he'd get black in the face and screech, You lie! You lie!!

Would, could M's. Lamar tell Michael? And make Michael promise to believe it wasn't the Pole? And if M's. Lamar she'd be that grand and good, "Oh, I tell you, M's. Lamar, I'll name my li'l' baby—I'll name him after you!"

"I say, Mrs. Michael, instead of naming that baby after me, you name him after Mr. Hutchins."

"Who's him?"

CHAPTER XIII

I

THIS time Jenny's arms were extended wide, but it was in no ecstasy of joy at being alive. She was tired, really tired, and stood in the office with her hat and coat on, indulging in a bit of stretching—the kind which seems to get a few kinks out of a weary system. The kind you indulge in the first thing in the morning, and again the last thing at night, and yawn, while you indulge. Tired.

What real suffering there was, besides just being tired, when you knew you knew how to improve a situation, and were powerless, alone, to take the necessary steps. Two hours that day she and Andrew Hutchins had argued. Discontent among the men was growing daily. Both the union, under Pete, and the I. W. W., under Emanuel, were making headway. Trouble was in the air. Either Mr. Hutchins should get a new secretary, and let her, Jenny, give all her time to the labor end of things, or he should hire some one who could understand the labor situation and give all his time to that.

Flatly he had refused to give Jenny up as secretary—he had grown too dependent on her. At his age, the very thought of breaking in some new person was dismaying. Rather than hire a new man to handle the labor end, right now when profits were shrinking anyway, it would be much

simpler, and cheaper, to fire all the union men and all the I. W. W.'s. Long since he had heard of Pete's and Emanuel's activities and had threatened to fire both. Jenny told him she would resign the day he did that. "What—what do you mean, Mrs. Lamar?"

Jenny carefully explained that what both Pete and Emanuel wanted above all else was to be fired. They could make more headway in a week as martyrs than in three months of staying on the job. They had real grievances. Wages, it was true, were as high as in other factories doing the same sort of work. But countless minor difficulties over individual wage cases continually arose. There was no adequate body to handle the complaints, and with enough time to think about it and grumble about it, a thirty-five-cent mistake, real or fancied, could grow into three hundred and fifty dollars' worth of trouble. Piece rates needed adjusting. The method of payment cost the men hours. The whole foreman business was in a mess. Most of the foremen were older men, the few remaining relics of those rosy days Andrew Hutchins' mind loved to dwell upon. Like him, they could not see "where all these damn Dagoes and Jews and Poles come from, anyhow." Men were fired for scarce any excuse at all—the whim of one of the old-school employees, a foreman who considered the workers under him as riff-raff. Many of them were. But much of industrialism has to be carried on with riff-raff, so called. But because a man is riff-raff in the shop, Jenny had learned, did not mean his soul was riff-raff. There was something of riff-raff in every mortal, and there was something much finer than riff-raff in every mortal. Only

some environments served to minimize the riff-raff, some served to bring it to the fore. Nothing emphasizes the riff-raff element of a human being like considering him all riff-raff.

Then there was the whole question of "these agitators." The day Mr. Hutchins had wanted to fire Pete and Emanuel, Jenny had told him: "I've a much better scheme than that. Call a meeting of all the factory—make attendance compulsory, and make Pete and Emanuel address the meeting."

"Mrs. Lamar, have you lost your senses?"

"Not a bit. In the first place, the shock would practically paralyze them both. We'd put big placards all over the factory. It would rob their plans of all their romance, dragging them out into full and approved publicity. I've talked to both of them by the hour. Both of them have a lot of splendid ideas—ideas which would be peace and money in your pockets and theirs if you—and they—would adopt them. But most of their notions have no value to them at all—just words, words. Out of two thousand workers there'd be a plenty who would sense that fact in a minute, and begin to ask, 'Just how smart through and through are these men who would have us follow implicitly?' But the greatest thing of all,—Mr. Hutchins, you have no idea what a time it would be!—Pete thinks his ideas are the only ideas which can make the world over and bring peace, prosperity, and the Rule of the Workers. Emanuel knows his ideas are the real Truth and the Light. And Pete's ideas and Emanuel's ideas don't agree in the least. By the time they got through squabbling and the au-

dience got through listening to their squabbling, and perhaps squabbling themselves, every one's soul would be in a far healthier condition and every one, except Pete and Emanuel, might come to realize that after all there was no great hurry about swallowing whole what either Pete or Emanuel had to say. The conditions which both complain about justly we could take immediate steps to improve."

"Mrs. Lamar, sometimes you talk as if after all you are merely a woman, with the limitations of a woman's mind."

So there was no meeting, and Emanuel and Pete continued their under-cover activities.

This special day Mr. Hutchins and Jenny had gone over the financial statement for the year. Some months previously profits had begun to shrink. Prices had therefore been advanced, as much as it was felt the public would stand for. Still the financial statement looked discouraging. Experts had figured on sales and distribution; other experts on markets for raw materials. There was no doubt about it, what ate up profits was wages. Wages would have to come down.

"Mr. Hutchins! You decrease wages ten cents with the spirit of the men what it is to-day, and you'll have the factory in a heap around your ears. It's not wages—it's the fearful turnover. Just as you say, men come and go, come and go. Ask Jo what a new man does to a machine. Ask Luko what happens in Department Eighteen when a new man comes in and holds up the whole department. Ask old Bill Turner what new men do up on his floor. Get one of your experts in to figure out just what it costs

to teach a new man the game, what he wastes while he's learning, how much he holds the other men back, what the continual shifting does to the morale of the entire factory. Figure up how many new men you hire in a year to keep this factory running. Then see if you think it would be worth your while to make the factory a place where Dagoes and Jews and Poles might like to stay a little longer—and Americans and Irish and Germans. . . .”

But Andrew Hutchins had felt that the financial statement warranted no further investigations, and anyway, the expert might make recommendations which in turn would only necessitate further expenditures. Nothing in business was as expensive as “a lot of new-fangled notions.” In the old days it took no new-fangled notions to hold the men.

After the long argument he was tired, Jenny was tired. He had gone home. Jenny stayed on to finish up the work, and now at last was ready for home and her boys. The telephone rang.

“Mrs. Lamar? Mr. Hutchins speaking. Don't you think you and I need a little vacation? I need to get away for a few days and so do you. Mrs. Hutchins says you are to bring the boys to her, and I want you to go with me to the National Chamber of Commerce Convention at Atlantic City. The trip will do you good. There's a lot of work we can get done—I'm afraid we can't make it an out-and-out vacation. Call it a change. We'll start day after to-morrow.”

Atlantic City! She, Jenny Lamar, in Atlantic City! A chance to go swimming! A chance to sleep on the train!

A chance to see new places and things and people! Atlantic City!

She thrust her feet out, leaned her head against the back of the chair, threw her smiling kiss to heaven. Atlantic City!

And to go off like that without a single responsibility on earth, except to tend to Andrew Hutchins' business affairs. She could almost do that in her sleep by now. No meals to plan at home, no household worries of any sort. Faithful Mrs. Smith, the housekeeper,—she'd get a vacation too. She deserved it. A week of change for everybody. A week to get away from everybody's troubles in the factory. After all, she was not a real Christian at heart. She was glad, yes, glad, she was getting away from everybody's troubles for a week. . . . A week to get away from—from not knowing what in the world to do about certain—men. Complicated old world.

2

The fun of packing a suitcase when it is to be filled with only one's Best! Not since—when had she ever? Once before, yes, once before. . . . Years and years and years ago, she, Jenny Lamar, had gone on her wedding trip. . . . She stood beside the bed, the open suitcase before her, and looked back, back, back, those—decades. Billy . . . oh, oh, Billy! She dropped on her knees, buried her head in her arms, and cried as she had not let herself for—oh, how long? . . . Billy! . . . That kind of joy and warmth and protection—the comfort, the immeasurable

comfort of it all—gone, gone forever. Billy! To feel those arms again! This unending coming home to a house without a man. . . . The boys, the blessed boys. What in the world could she ever have done, could she ever do, without the boys, and the home they made? But they were boys—children. Ach, these people who implied that children could take the place of a man! Nothing, nothing took the place of a man. Billy! . . .

And then when she got to the business of the suitcase again, she had to smile through her tears. That other time, those years and years ago, when she had packed that very same suitcase with her Best—and had ended at Smedly! Her Best at Smedly! But it had been her Best for Billy.

Atlantic City! Cheer yourself, Jenny Lamar, you are going to Atlantic City! Run blue ribbons through articles which have known only white tape. Get out that collection of Christmas handkerchiefs stored away year after year, too good to use, waiting all this time for their virgin blow. Don't you take one single second-rate handkerchief. . . . Wherever is that pale blue dressing gown, packed those years ago to Smedly, never worn at Smedly, never worn since, except twice while the trained nurse was still about, after Steve and Alec were born. . . . Silk stockings—nothing but silk stockings this trip—those lovely ones that friend of Mrs. Hutchins' gave you last Christmas. . . . Those foolish little sachet bags—put them in. . . . The handsome wrap from Mrs. Hutchins, christened just last week—that might come handy. . . . Mr. Hutchins told her he was

going to retire at nine every night, but she, Jenny, was to have all the fun she possibly could cram in. It wasn't the prospect of the fun, so much—she had fun enough, goodness knows, week in, week out. But it was—Atlantic City! Adventure!

. . . Those silly dressing slippers she had never worn—funny little plump blonde, wife of that steel man, gave her those last Christmas. Jenny Lamar, in pale pink be-laced slippers with little heels! Never mind, they and the pale blue dressing gown would fit into Atlantic City. . . . Gloves? No! No gloves, not even for Atlantic City. No!

And last of all, and, oh, so carefully, Jenny Lamar, pack that wicked extravagance of yours purchased in the noon hour this very day—that new evening dress. Shame on you, Jenny Lamar. . . . But wasn't it lovely! What a shade of blue! The luck of the way it fit! . . . If only she could have afforded slippers and stockings to match. . . .

What nonsense—as if really she would have any better time. Whenever in her life had she remembered to think of her feet once she was dressed up and off?

The next morning the Hutchins machine called for her. She waved good-by to Steve and Alec in their patched overalls and shrunken sweaters, their shoes out at the toes, socks falling down over the tops. Saturday, red cheeks, fun. More fun in old overalls than new. Then that afternoon, Mrs. Hutchins'. "Mother, don't you just *love* their butler? Look, mother, I'm taking him two of my pet snails, and Steve's going to let him have six of his street-car transfers!"

There, at the station, was Mr. Hutchins, bless his tired old heart. Goodness, there was—well, now, however did he know Jenny was leaving this morning? She had just told him vaguely that she was going to Atlantic City.

When?

Saturday.

What train?

She had no idea.

As if you could really leave for any place and have no idea when you started. . . .

That man had an uncanny way of always appearing everywhere. . . . After all, though, it was exciting to start off with flowers like that, and a box of candy. It amused Andrew Hutchins, and anything to make him smile these troubled days was worth while.

How much more agreeable almost everything is when you don't have to pay for it yourself. Of course it shouldn't be so. And there are times when it isn't so. . . . On those few occasions when Jenny Lamar had ever found herself in a dining car, the romance and glory of it lasted until she saw the bill of fare. From then on one picked one's way gingerly. . . . Here she sat at a little table across from Andrew Hutchins and he just ordered chicken without looking at the menu. Romance, glory, never took wings the whole trip.

To lounge back in the Pullman and just look out the window. No children to get into a scrap, or break their pencils, or want to be read to. All of which didn't bother you while you were doing it. Only this thing of having

nothing at all to think of, no one at all to pay attention to and amuse—instead an uninterrupted chance to fold your arms and look out a car window. . . . Perhaps you saw dish pans at back doors and lines of underpinnings and kitchen aprons and boys' overalls strung from the rear of the house to the nearest telegraph pole. Yet even though styles in wash basins and underpinnings and kitchen aprons and boys' overalls don't change much from town to town—hardly, for that matter, from generation to generation—still, since they are part of life and the world in general, Jenny was for looking at dish pans and underpinnings and aprons and overalls just because they *were*. More than that, it is difficult to travel far and have nothing but dish pans and clothes lines to gaze upon. There are open spaces of sorts between most towns in our land, and what might one not see if one kept one's eyes wide open for the glories of the universe—and all in spring! Grass and trees and bits of color here and there which meant the first flowers, or a bird on the wing. If by chance there were a glimpse of a brook, or a gay unconscious waterfall slipping over rocks, age-old before ever the steel for railroad tracks was imagined in the world. . . . Ah, who was the richest woman in creation?

Suddenly she clutched Mr. Hutchins' arm,—tired Mr. Hutchins, who was asleep beside her.

"What—what's happened?" He peered sleepily ahead of him.

"Oh, I'm sorry, sorry!" Jenny's conscience smote her. To have wakened him!

"What was it?"

"I'm sorry. . . . But"—Jenny's heart was still beating extraordinarily fast—"I saw—a trout!"

Mr. Hutchins closed his eyes again. "What are you going to do about it?"

Bless him, he never got angry at anything. Imagine that man—whatever was his awful name—reporting that Mr. Hutchins had glared at him and said "You fool!" As if Andrew Hutchins could call any one a fool. She could picture instead just how he probably had looked,—a hint of a twinkle in his eye, "Man, are you crazy? What would I want with your ninety-one cents?" . . . That was the way of it, the tragic way of it. Once the men got looking for trouble, once some one could sell them the idea that the "boss" was their mortal enemy, everything was misconstrued. . . . Forget the factory, Jenny Lamar, for one whole week.

. . . Flowers did not keep long on a train—too bad. What did you do with men who kept giving you things? She had learned a great deal from Thomas Hatch. But she had learned nothing about this presents business because Thomas Hatch had never given her a present. She had learned that as long as she never let a man so much as hold her hand, she was safe. Never a turmoil. But whoever could have guessed that it could take such effort to keep a man from holding your hand? Not physical effort—that would have been simple. If only she belonged to Linny Manny's circle. When a man at the factory tried to get sweet on Linny, and Linny wanted none of him, she slapped his face hard and called him just the names she wanted to call him, and the man perfectly understood.

There were several difficulties there which Linny did not have to face. All Linny saw in men was the possibility of permanent attachment. She had Standards. Did a man come along who measured up to those Standards, the sweeter he got on Linny, the better. She slapped only the men she didn't like. Any one she liked—welcome.

Now if Jenny disliked a man, it would have been simple enough. There would be no need for Linny's tactics. She could make it quite plain she desired his absence. But what was there to do when you liked a man, when you preferred having him around, and, in Linny's lingo, he got sweet on you? She was not one bit smart about it. Suppose the man was interesting—a clever talker—and you had no end of a good time together. Inevitably, or almost inevitably, the night came when he would want to—hold your hand. Up to then everything had been perfect,—the gods had sent you a new friend—and a man was always so much more interesting to talk to than a woman. From that time on, nothing was perfect any more. Some women must be able to manage. Why couldn't she, Jenny?

Had it not been for Thomas Hatch, and the next man after Thomas Hatch, she would have argued, what then is there to worry about in holding hands? When you love loving people, what terrible harm could come, for goodness' sake, in—a little loving? Again, she very much preferred doing what a person wanted, to not being obliging. If a person wanted to be—affectionate, she would, on general principles, have enjoyed being accommodating. And then, and then, it was so very much nicer being affectionate one's self! She was no ice box.

But those turmoils! Not for all the world would she let herself get into the state Thomas Hatch got her in. Never! Good-by efficiency, good-by peace and comfort! . . .

Yet—just a little affection. What could a little affection hurt? So had argued a still small voice the first experience after Thomas Hatch—that very nice man she had met the very first dinner at the Hutchinses'. What times they had had together! And then—just a little affection—it was so—so pleasant. The lesson that man taught her, and she would never risk it again, was that it never stops at a little affection. The man always seems to want a little more. And that would never do at all. Then it approached the Thomas Hatch state of affairs. No man would ever kiss her again as long as she lived! Never, never would she take her chances on *that* happening twice!

After several—"friendships"—of various sorts and descriptions it had boiled down to this: there must never be even a start—never anything at all but just, just . . . unadorned—friendship. But she, Jenny Lamar, did not find unadorned friendship an entirely soul-satisfying procedure. She, Jenny Lamar, would like to love her friends—a little. Good gracious, was she to forego every show of affection for a man the rest of her life?

Besides, it was all more complicated than it sounded. Simple enough to say, never let anything get started. But a woman couldn't be thinking the first night a man took her out, "Now is he going to reach a stage where it will be uncomfortable?" No! It was much more agreeable, and you felt much more sensible, if you proceeded on the assumption that *here*, at last, is a man who will stay for-

ever a mere friend. If only once it would turn out that way. Everything so splendid, everything so interesting, everything so comfortable. Perhaps he might really never actually get—affectionate. But the time came almost always when no one but a moron could fail to realize that something was getting mixed. The unadulterated friendship was becoming—adulterated. It just never could be the same from that moment on. If you kept on acting just the same, as if you noted nothing in the air, it might be only a question of days before the thing would go to pieces about both your heads. “Jenny, Jenny, I love you!” And from then on there could be either nothing, or a spoiled something.

She had discovered one way to do it—it had worked in two cases—but what a miserable and artificial feeling it gave her. Was any man worth such effort? She drew in before anything ever happened, something like a snail. Only drawing in ran against the grain of everything inside her. And after all, she had no shell. She played a tiring game with herself and the man. What was the use of a relationship if you couldn’t be perfectly and absolutely natural? Would the gods please send her one relationship where she could be perfectly and absolutely natural, and have nothing in all the world happen? But would the gods at the same time please send some sign, right at the very start, so she could know that this time she really need never have one moment’s worry? . . . Or would she, now honest!—would she, Jenny Lamar, then begin to worry as to what the matter could be that the man always stayed so—so just friendly?

What a complicated place, after all, the world could

become. . . . How simple it had all been with Billy. . . . Never anything to make you think twice from beginning to end. Every day and night—except for that matter of Cynthia's baby—had been entirely comfortable, entirely natural, no calculations about anything or anybody. . . . If she had died first, instead of Billy, she would have left the world thinking it all just like that, for everybody. . . . Of course, there had been her mother and Dr. Cairns. Now she knew how much her mother must have suffered, how much Dr. Cairns must have suffered. . . . And Cynthia Rawlins and dear old Uncle Alec—what they had probably gone through! But those were only two exceptions in an otherwise perfectly adjusted world. How little there was for any one to worry over! How contented most women were with their husbands, and most husbands were with their wives,—never, practically never, straying afield. What a satisfactory and harmonious relationship almost always existed between men and women. . . . So she would have thought, if she had thought at all—on her death bed.

“How about a bite of supper, Mrs. Secretary?”

“Hello—I thought you were asleep!”

“Long ago I betook myself to the smoking car. You were so busy thinking you never so much as knew I departed. I don't believe you even realize that it has gotten pitch dark and there is nothing more you can possibly see by continuing to look out that window!”

And the next time it got dark, in the calendar of Jenny Lamar's affairs, it was Atlantic City.

CHAPTER XIV

I

A TRAVELING salesman may get somewhat tired of hotels at times. Every one knows that any one gets tired of anything if he gets one inch more than enough of it. Jenny never made so much as a start toward getting enough of hotel life. Indeed in all her days she had slept in hotels some four times. Funny hotels, three of them. Mild things off the principal thoroughfares, very lacy curtains, very patterny carpets, very curlycue furniture, and a pair of shady cupid effects holding a collection of mustard, pepper, salt, and vinegar in the center of each dining-room table. And a plate of soda crackers—at breakfast, as well as dinner, in the middle of the day, and supper. Billy used to take her to the Best, a fairly good Best, at any rate the pride of the town where they used to live, for lunch or dinner every so often. The Hutchinses, and the friends of the Hutchinses, and the men she knew, took her to the Best, one or all three of the Best, at home, for lunch or dinner, or dances. But not to sleep. Hardly. She had always longed to sleep in—actually to feel part of—a great big gorgeous brand-new hotel. What would it be like? She had never lived in a place which boasted that kind.

In the exciting three days since she had known that Atlantic City was to be for her more than a dot on a map, or a picture post card, or a name, Jenny had never

thought of the hotel end of it. Atlantic City had a beach and a board walk. Beyond that—of course they wouldn't sleep on either the beach or the board walk. If she visioned her private quarters at all, it was to see herself rising in the morning, getting into that pale blue silk dressing gown, and those pale pink belaced slippers with the funny little heels, and gazing about on what she hoped would be a neat room, probably looking out upon railroad tracks. Just because three of the four hotel rooms she had ever slept in all looked out upon railroad tracks. Other than that, Atlantic City meant a beach and a board walk, and a place where she could hear men talking about what was going on in the world she loved. And somehow some hazy evening setting for that new blue evening dress. Mr. Hutchins had told her: "Atlantic City is nothing, nothing. Cheap, commonplace. It's a bore to think of having to go there. But I can rest." Jenny knew better. No place was a bore.

Therefore, when she was helped out of the hotel bus and into the hotel lobby, she merely blinked. She stood stock-still in everybody's way, and blinked. Was there any room in Atlantic City for a beach and a board walk *and* this hotel? Perhaps both beach and board walk had been sacrificed.

"Here we are!" It was the familiar voice of Mr. Hutchins. "The boy will take you to your room, 615. I'm two floors below, 415, if you need to get in touch with me about anything. It's so late—I wouldn't dress for dinner to-night. I'm sorry I've got to eat with those men. But I see Mr. and Mrs. Holmes over there,—come let me introduce you, and you can have dinner with them."

"Please, Mr. Hutchins, I'd so much rather eat alone! I'd just love eating alone, and then I can be looking at everything and everybody all the time!"

Jenny followed after the boy with her suitcase. They got off the elevator at the sixth floor. Whereupon Jenny sank into plush carpets—she thought above her pump tops. Luxury!—but difficult to keep clean with children. At 615 they stopped, the porter unlocked the door, turned on the lights, deposited her baggage, and departed. And again Jenny just stood and blinked. 'Way off in what seemed the dim distance there was the opposite side of the room. Faintly she marked the outlines of a bureau against the wall. 'Way off to her right was another wall, and a dressing table. 'Way off to her left, some place in the infinity of space between there and that wall, were two beds, also a chiffonier lost in the atmosphere, also a desk, also a table. If she put one foot out and started to walk, as though she were still human, could she sometime reach these various articles of furniture?

Then all at once she became appalled. Surely Mr. Hutchins had never meant her to have a room like this—a huge thing designed for a millionairess. It would cost too fearfully much! She must get hold of him at once and let him know that a room under the hotel laundry or over the kitchen, opening out onto an air shaft, was plenty good enough for her.

She called for 415. "Mr. Hutchins speaking."

"Mr. Hutchins, there's some mistake. You ought to see—they've given me the wrong room!"

"I'll be darned," said Mr. Hutchins. "I'll be darned. I'll see about it at once. What's the matter?"

"Why, it's too good—too big—much too—too expensive a room for me! A little room—some funny little room—is quite good enough for me!"

Andrew Hutchins gave that laugh of his, the laugh he almost forgot nowadays. "So that's it! Well, you stay just where you are." Then he chuckled, that sly chuckle. "I say, Mrs. Lamar, we'll make up the difference out of the pay envelopes of your friends the Proletariat, eh? Good-by!"

Already it was plain to see Atlantic City was doing Andrew Hutchins good.

So then—this was her room, and her conscience was clear. And since her conscience was clear and her digestion good and she hadn't an ache or a pain to her name and she was as yet not so very much the other side of thirty, Jenny Lamar let out three squeals of joy, and then went on a hop, skip, and jump tour of inspection. First she must peer out of every one of her four windows—and discovered that all four looked out on what must in daylight be the Atlantic Ocean. She would arise at daybreak and look out upon the Atlantic Ocean. Then she danced from the bureau to the dresser to the desk to the chiffonier to the table. She opened all the drawers. She sat in every one of the chairs. She counted the electric lights and put them all on and off. She discovered she possessed a large closet. She threw it a kiss. She opened another door.

Where is the human heart, at least the human female heart developed to a certain standard of civilization, which

does not succumb to a perfectly appointed bathroom? Jenny succumbed. Really it would be too bad to be brought up with a bathroom like that,—one's appreciation might grow dull with years. One needed the background of Lamar bathrooms to correctly value what Jenny gazed upon, and one needed the constant evidences of what male young considered sufficient habits of cleanliness, to duly esteem the vision of spotless white tile which met Jenny's enraptured eyes. . . . What can fill a mother's heart with more pride than to usher a guest into the bathroom when the dear little children used it last? Streaks of muddy water all over the washstand, the soap camouflaged with a pattern of dirt, and such mud and dirt as was not left on the washstand and soap, decorates the only towel to be seen. A pair of muddy overalls is in one corner, muddy shoes in another, a collection, evidently from the muddy overall pockets, of three dirty handkerchiefs, six snails, a pack of smelly cigarette cards, crust of dried bread, a knife minus blades, two small bottles filled with gravel, a ball of wet clay, on top of the wash basket; and last, but not least, a pet water snake in the bath tub. And probably the guest is an old maid lacking all contact with young, male or female, or a bachelor. . . .

A beach, a board walk—and all of this to boot! Out in the middle of her plush-carpeted room again she threw out her arms and whirled around on one toe, as well as plush carpets allowed. She blew a kiss to every piece of furniture, she blew a kiss to the Atlantic Ocean she would see at day-break. Out loud she cried pompously, "This all belongs to me, Jenny Lamar!" Then suddenly she thought of

Scotty without any teeth. How Scotty would scold and rant at all of this! All of it paid for out of the pockets of the Proletariat. He'd have taken Andrew Hutchins right seriously.

"Scotty, Scotty, must I then not enjoy any of it, *really*? Would you and Emanuel and all the rest truly be happier if I stood here in the middle of my glory and wept? Should I sleep on the beach or the board walk? Oh, really now, Scotty, happy people are good for the world, and I'm so terribly, awfully happy! Eh, Scotty?"—and she turned and blew a kiss in the general direction of where that person lived—west—"it's a new set of teeth would help you most, and not scolding about where I sleep and who pays for it!"

She could not wait for sunrise. About ten o'clock she wandered out and felt the sand under her feet, though she almost broke her neck getting down to it in the dark, and put one finger in the Atlantic Ocean. If Steve and Alec were only here for the beach and that Atlantic Ocean! She walked along the deserted board walk until it commenced to drizzle. She watched the bustle and life of the hotel: men who knew the industrial life of the nation rested on their shoulders rushing here and there, putting their heads together, frowning heavily, in every available corner. To-morrow the convention began.

Bedtime. Woe—she had forgotten her suitcase all this while, and that blue dress still squashed in it! She rushed to rescue her treasures—and opened a suitcase to gaze upon a carefully folded man's dinner jacket, a pair of light blue pajamas. They had mixed her things with Mr.

Hutchins'. Probably he was sitting on the edge of the bed wondering what he would sleep in. Undoubtedly he had been trying to reach her and recover his belongings.

She dashed to the phone,—“415!” A long wait. At last a very sleepy voice, somewhat impatiently, said, “Mr. Hutchins speaking.”

“Mr. Hutchins—I’m so sorry. This is Jenny Lamar. I’ve got your pajamas!”

“My what?”

“Why, what you sleep in. I’m so sorry! I’ll send them right down. And please give the boy my suitcase to bring back.”

“I’m—there’s some mistake. I’ve got my pajamas on. I’m asleep—or was asleep.”

“Then this isn’t your suitcase?”

“No, my suitcase is here.”

Jenny wanted to hurl herself out the sixth-story window in mortification. To waken a tired man about a pair of pajamas which didn’t belong to him. . . . But who was sitting on the edge of a bed waiting to retire, and gazing ruefully at her blue evening dress?

She phoned her troubles to headquarters. Yes, a gentleman had been looking for his suitcase since seven o’clock.

2

It was the next night after a dinner where she sat, the only woman, and listened eagerly to six men discuss the merchant marine; after a vaudeville show at the hotel, staged for the entertainment of the delegates to the Cham-

ber of Commerce Convention and their families and friends, that Jenny found herself standing against a pillar watching staid couples from Iowa and Ohio, Arkansas and Illinois, Maine and Georgia, dance as dancing goes in the home town. The ladies, like Jenny, had, many of them, indulged in an eleventh-hour extravagance, and were experiencing such conscious comfort as a new dress, one's best dress, inspires. The second wearing usually makes for added contentment of soul. There seemed to be more people watching than dancing,—it was evident the National Chamber of Commerce was not a hundred per cent dancing organization. Mr. Hutchins and the men she had met during the day and at dinner were not the dancing kind. What a waste of any life—to live out its days minus dancing!

A voice behind her: "Would you care to dance?"

She looked over her shoulder. A man of about forty whose face she very much liked was also leaning against the pillar. He was looking at her, but still she wasn't sure.

"Were you speaking to me?"

"I was making so bold as to speak to you. I feel an awful lot like dancing and knew nobody to dance with. I thought I'd take my chances on you being in that same state."

"Oh, I want *terribly* to dance!"

But he could waltz—oh, how he could waltz! The combination of his manner of waltzing and the fact that he was one of those rare souls who have sense enough not to ruin good dancing by trying to talk at the same time,—
"Ah," said Jenny to herself, "the gods always love me."

Since he knew no one else who danced, and she knew no one else who danced, and since it was plain both loved dancing, it was only natural that they danced together the whole evening long. They talked little—none at all while they danced. Just before midnight the orchestra played the Blue Danube Waltz. Jenny was not sure during that dance whether she was in heaven or on earth. When it was over he said a little shyly: "That was so very wonderful,—I'd rather not dance any more after that. I'd like just staying up in the clouds." How very much sense he had. So she said good night. Upstairs, in her room, looking out over the darkness of the ocean, she wondered why it was you could almost always tell it in your bones when an Adventure was in the air. There was no Adventure on earth like a new friend. . . .

The next morning was the big opening General Session. Jenny and Mr. Hutchins went together, in the huge hall out on the pier. First they stood up while a Right Reverend prayed for the Lord to make all business men pure and good and honest and God-fearing and exactly as the Lord would like to see business men, and everybody, be; and then business men and everybody repeated the Lord's Prayer. When they came to "Thy Kingdom come," each member undoubtedly visioned a hundred per cent triumph of the open shop; with the "Give us this day our daily bread," Jenny knew it meant three meals at the Traymore with one order of scrambled eggs for breakfast, sixty cents. How conceited a hen would get if she knew. And then they all murmured, "Forgive us our trespasses," and

by that of course all the business men must have had any profiteering in mind; "as we forgive those that trespass against us," and there they probably thought of the A. F. of L. and I. W. W.'s and such. . . . And then Jenny listened to Reports and Rules of Convention and Approvals and then a speech by the President of the National Chamber of Commerce. She wanted to rush up afterwards and tell him how fine it was. Either the prayer had done him a lot of good, or he was born like that. "Dangerous in places," Mr. Hutchins considered his address.

In the afternoon Mr. Hutchins went to one set of meetings and dispatched Jenny to another, so that she could report on who said what. She listened to four speeches, on Sales and Distribution, two of which were very good, two of which were very poor. As the discussion finally ended, she heard what was now a familiar voice ask, "Do you like to swim?"

"*Do I?*" And there again was the man with the face she so very much liked.

It was too early and cold for the ocean. They walked as briskly as they could up the far end of the board walk and managed to squeeze into the big swimming-tank building just as the proprietor was locking up for the day. He gave them their suits and towels and asked them to take the key across the street when they were done. "He must be a socialist," Jenny laughed. Yet socialists and Atlantic City didn't seem to fit. She laughed again when, their swim over, out once more in the bracing air, she discovered a worn volume of Marx's "Capitalism" in a secondhand bookstore on the board walk. Who ever would buy it at

Atlantic City? They ate peanut candy and spoilt their appetites and looked in all the windows and watched all the people.

"Shall we go swimming again to-morrow?"

"I say we shall."

He was so comfortable.

As she turned to go up the hotel steps he called hesitatingly, "I—I don't suppose you'd care to dance again to-night?"

"Oh, but I would care to dance again to-night!"

Again a dinner with Mr. Hutchins. She listened to splendid gray-haired men discuss finances, transportation, foreign credits, and made mental notes to develop later for Mr. Hutchins. "Just what was it Clement said that night about Southern Pacific right of way?" His memory was not what it used to be. Jenny had it down in black and white—not always correctly, but it recalled the matter to Andrew Hutchins' mind, and he could fill out gaps himself, or make minor corrections. How she admired the way men's minds could work! Until they touched here and there on their bugbear, labor, and then, after all, she knew they were just mortals, with the shortcomings of mortals. Everything they seemed to understand about the inanimate side of business. Was it because on the whole they had never considered the matter worthy of real thought and study, the kind of thought and study they expended on refinancing a transportation company, for instance, that they never gave the human side of business any worthwhile consideration at all? It was not that their opinions on the subject differed from hers. What was a difference

of opinion? But they had ideas which she, Jenny Lamar, *knew* were founded not at all on fact. Financial matters they investigated personally, or had experts investigate for them. When it came to labor, they believed every silly story they heard. Some day even their finances, their carefully, conscientiously considered finances, might get all tangled up with their foolish notions about how working men and women should be treated.

"Scum," one man called them. Very well, call them scum. Even a man who could refer to fellow beings as scum would have to admit that it was this scum upon which these gray-haired financiers in the last analysis had to depend to keep industry going. Not the most modern factory in all the world ran without—scum. And scum had shown, was showing, that it could get itself and every one else into a good deal of trouble now and then. If the trains of these railroad men kept running off the tracks they would look into the engines and cars and roadbeds. When labor went askew it was only the fault of labor—the roadbed was never investigated. And the relation of labor to its job one mass of split rails!

Jenny wondered what the man with the face she liked, the comfortable man, would have said to it all. He was across the dining room with a group of younger men. They smiled at each other, he and she, now and then.

3

"Did you ever see the moon on the Atlantic Ocean?" he asked her as they started to dance.

She had never seen the moon on any ocean.

"Suppose we take a walk first,—you've no idea how wonderful it is."

Which was how it happened that they sat on the sand bundled up in wraps and talked that night until two o'clock, instead of dancing.

In the afternoon she had told him: "Do you know what would be fun? Let's not even know each other's names. You dropped out of nowhere. I dropped out of nowhere. The chances are we shall never see each other again as long as we live. I shall call you—Peter, Mr. Peter."

"And I shall call you 'Miss Jenny.'"

"But Jenny is my real name! Only it's Mrs. Jenny."

"I know Jenny is your real name. . . . You see, it was I who had your suitcase."

"How did you know it was mine?"

"Because the blue dress was on top. I suppose really that was what gave me courage to ask you to dance. I felt a bit at home with that blue dress. . . . You see, you couldn't be expected to recognize my dinner jacket. . . . Just on top of the blue dress was a handkerchief,—it had 'Jenny' in one corner."

And so, that night on the beach, because neither knew anything about the other, not even their real names, and both had the feeling that after Atlantic City they would never see each other again, and because it was night and moonlight,—because of all of that, they talked about things more intimately than either had ever talked. They discussed his business, his industrial dreams. He told her of the women he had loved, and where and how, and the

questionings and problems and doubts and disappointments. So that Jenny realized as never before that men faced countless complexities in the world the gods let get out of hand so long ago, as well as women. She told him of Billy. He was the only person she had ever found with whom she could really talk about Billy. She told him of Thomas Hatch, and every man since. Several times, the first night when they danced together, he had spoken of his wife. To-night he said nothing of her at all. That was strange. Each had asked the other very bold questions. At last Jenny asked him about that,—why he talked so little of his wife.

He looked out over the ocean—by that time there was no moon left. “I know why. . . . We’re being so very honest—I’ll tell you why. It’s just that. You see, I’ve never let myself *think* honestly about—her. Much less can I bring myself to talk honestly about it all. No, I think I’m afraid to face the situation squarely. For twelve years I’ve told myself that everything was going—well enough. . . . I’ve got to go on thinking that. . . . There is nothing that can be done about it. . . . She’s a good deal of an invalid. . . . Last night with you was the first time I’d danced in—years. I was almost afraid to try again. I never could have, except for the friendly blue dress. . . . I love people so—all kinds, *all* kinds. I love having them around, being around where they are. I’d always visioned a home where people, all kinds of people, would love to come . . . and I love music . . . and dancing . . . and good books. . . . No, no, don’t ask me to talk about my home. It all goes—well enough.”

There are two sides to everything. "And she—how much of it all—of the things she loved—has she had to give up?"

"That's a fair question. . . . Funny, I hardly know. You see, I've never in my life been as honest about things as to-night, never tried so hard to see things just as they are. I long ago got out of the habit of 'opening up.' She and I, even in the days when she was comparatively well, didn't talk ever—like this. Just surface things. I didn't know a man talked this way with any woman—with anybody, for that matter. . . . I really don't know what she's had to give up. I do know she never did like people. I know she never did like books. She never had learned to dance, and never wanted to—I suppose her health was at the bottom of that. . . . She loved children. I suppose that is the great thing she has had to give up. We have only one child, a little girl. It was from the time she was born, eight years ago, that her—my wife's—health has been so poor."

"So what it amounts to is that the salvage of twelve years is for you, your business; for her, a child. Is she interested in your business?"

"Not at all."

"Are you interested in her—your—child?"

"Of course. I can't understand her, but I love her—more than anything else in the world."

"Why did you get married? I can't see."

"I don't know. Men just do. They reach a certain age, some one comes along, and they marry. How many men, I wonder, can ever tell just *why*, especially why just

that particular woman. There may have been a possible dozen, say, during the so-called marriageable years,—they might have picked any one of the dozen they were more or less and off and on in love with. Sometimes it happens the one they really loved the most married some one else. . . . Of course, once you find yourself really married, you're sure you can make a splendid go of it. I knew I'd make a great success of my marriage. . . . I always have said it was the man's fault if the thing didn't go right. . . . I wonder just where I slipped up. . . . To-night, being honest, I sincerely think the whole trouble of it was not her health. I've always said it would have been all right if she'd been strong. But that's not true. It would only have gone from bad to worse under any circumstances. The thing of it was, we hardly had a single interest in common. What basis is there to go on then?"

Jenny shook her head. "That's a bad start."

"I loved the woods, the country, wild things, camping. She disliked all of that. I loved just simple things around a home,—a little something to eat, not much furniture, lots of books. You can't move around our house for the clutter of possessions. And my books in a back room where they won't 'get in the way.' We eat like a hotel every night—just a fuss over food. I hate everything by the time it comes on the table. I loved business. It was a great game to me—always an Adventure into the untried. Each step fascinated me. A person wants to talk about their enthusiasms. She always said, 'Business is stupid.' I loved sports: tennis, boating, mountain climbing. Her health kept her from any of that. Above all, I loved peo-

ple, as I've told you. My friends, the men and women I had cared most about for years—she liked none of them. She didn't come right out with it that way. They just felt, one by one, they weren't wanted. Month in, month out, not a soul comes to our house. . . . Please don't let me go on like this! I hate myself for talking about it all. It doesn't help anything, and now I feel like a cad besides. Like a fearful cad. Some place, somehow, it's probably all my fault. . . . Quick, let's talk about something else!"

"Have you never thought of separating? Of getting a divorce?"

"Goodness, no! Why, a man doesn't get a divorce for things like that. Heavens, no! Besides—why, just consider her health. Imagine the kind of a man who would, could, divorce an invalid wife! I've been cad enough to talk about it at all—I'm not that much of a cad. Honestly I do try my best at home. It really goes pretty well all the time. . . . I'd much rather we talked some more about your Billy."

They in time discussed religion—he had never spoken of his religious ideas to anybody. Philosophers can spend an evening talking of God as the average man discusses politics. Most business men would rather lose a month's salary than be caught having anything to say on the subject at all. "So then," said Jenny, "I'll tell you my ideas first." She too had never put her faith and beliefs into words. Sometimes she and Billy had discussed religion, of course. But a perfectly contented person doesn't think a great deal about religious matters. Jenny, from the end of those ardent

church years in her early teens, had given religion scant thought. She loved the world and everything in it. She was sure the wrongdoings of mankind were brought about by causes over which the individual in reality had no direct control. Which applied to everybody else but not to herself. She felt entirely responsible for her own shortcomings. This life was the only chance we had to show what was in us, and the gods never forgave anybody who threw chances away. Your soul felt good when you had enough to do and didn't otherwise. There was a good deal of a mess in the world, but that didn't bother her so much. The world was altogether too big and had too many people in it and too much going on to allow for folks who were but recently swinging by their tails—or was the science of it that they didn't ever have tails?—in trees to be able to manage matters to suit the particular. The fact they tried to manage at all made the earth a very interesting place to live on, though very unrestful. She liked to smile and blow a kiss to heaven and call, "Thank You, God!" because she knew there was no other person in all creation who had so many good things fall her way. And that had been about all.

"What do you think about God?" he asked her almost fearfully.

"Oh, I don't believe there's a personal God. It just goes against such intellect as I possess. It is more comfortable to let a great many things go entirely unexplained than try to fit a personal God into the scheme of things, just to account for everything you can't account for any other way. And how terribly, awfully hard on the poor God, if

you believed in Him,—this mess of things! I'd be entirely too miserable myself to think of all He had to worry over. No, in my world there is no personal God. There is just you, and me, and the National Chamber of Commerce, and the League of Nations,—individuals, collections of individuals, struggling along, struggling along . . . working . . . hoping . . . making mistakes. . . . Yet there's so much that's fine about it all! I do love the world! But there is no personal God—except for those who prefer him."

"Do you *really* believe that?"

"Yes, why not? Does it seem wrong to you?"

"Why, it is what I've believed all my life almost, only I've been scared to tell any one. It's rather terrifying, don't you think, to feel alone in your ideas? There's an uncanny sensation about it. It would be so much more comfortable to have company in one's beliefs. . . . No one likes to have a lonely feeling about anything, does he?"

"I suppose that's why it's so hard to change people's ideas. They were sure of intellectual company with their old notions—that's how they happen to have them—a sort of group product or possession. If they branch off and think anything new, they're not quite sure of the company they'll find themselves in, not sure of whether there will be *enough* thinking that same new way. So they hang on forever to the old faiths and beliefs."

"Now I won't feel lonely any more about—God. Just to know there's one person in the world—that's company enough."

"You see, after to-night, you could always think about anything which came into your head, 'There's that Jenny

person,—she probably would agree with everything!’ Because we really have agreed on everything, haven’t we?”

“It’s the most wonderful feeling I think I ever had in all my life—that there really is some one in the world who would understand everything, absolutely everything.”

They both sat looking out over the expanse of black. . . . Almost a trifle wistfully he said: “You see, you knew that feeling for all those years. It’s not new to you.”

Jenny dug her heels in the sand. She was thinking hard, and still honestly.

“But back in those years there was not so much to understand, not such a need to be understood. . . .” She closed her eyes. “That life was a life without problems. That was centuries ago. In this new world—every week there is something to fight over, some new problem to face. In this new world I’ve never known what it was to feel—to feel like this. I could tell you anything, anything. I could go to you with every problem. . . . I’m very grateful for to-night.”

It was he who stood up first. It was he who said, “I think we had better go.”

CHAPTER XV

I

THE next morning the general session was on Transportation. Jenny sat next to Mr. Hutchins, as before, with pad and pencil for note-taking.

- i. Transportation.
 - a. *Railroads.*

“. . . There,”—Mr. Hutchins leaned slightly her way—
“make a note of that!”

Oh, woe. Jenny blinked. Transportation. She had been on a dark beach again. a. *Railroads.* What in the world had the man said? This was terrible. To fail Mr. Hutchins like that. Not another syllable would she miss. She took down practically every word shorthand.

- b. *Electric Railways.*

“. . . Those figures didn't agree with what Thomson said at dinner.”

Jenny Lamar! For *shame*. Where were you this time? Weren't you quite long enough on that beach last night without going back this way? . . . Again her pencil flew.

- c. *Highways.*

My, how interesting this very man was two nights ago at dinner! . . . And so easy to take notes from. Clean-cut

face he had. Just a little the same expression around the eyes as. . . .

“. . . What was that statement, Mrs. Lamar? I didn't catch it.”

So. Yes, so. Mrs. Lamar had not caught it, either. Mrs. Lamar, some one ought to drop you off the end of the pier. Oh, oh! She was disgusted. . . . Would this endless discussion of Transportation never be over?

d. *Merchant Marine.*

“Better take this all down shorthand,” Mr. Hutchins whispered. “I want it for the office files right away.”

“‘Mr. Chairman, Members of the National Chamber of Commerce, ladies and gentlemen. . . .’”

A slight cough to Jenny's left. Her heart stood stock-still. She turned her head slightly and looked out of the corner of her eyes. Directly next to her sat—Mr. Peter. The very next seat! . . . Can you manage it, Jenny Lamar,—that shorthand report on the Merchant Marine? She managed it.

Would he ask her to lunch? If so, should she accept, or ought she not to stay with Mr. Hutchins? It was the very last and only lunch she could ever have with Mr. Peter—they were leaving just before noon to-morrow. But what would Mr. Hutchins think, to be deserted like that, when perhaps he needed her for note-taking, or something? Mr. Peter—Mr. Hutchins. Mr. Hutchins—Mr. Peter.

“Oh, Mrs. Lamar, I forgot to tell you,—I've been asked to sit in for lunch to-day with the Transportation group.

I think I'd better go. You feel free to do anything you like until the afternoon sessions. I'd like you to attend the meeting on 'Machinery as an Aid to Labor Conservation,'—that general discussion, if you'll be so kind. A group of us meet with the Secretary of Commerce from three on, so I shan't be able to attend any meetings."

Free for lunch! Oh, Mr. Peter! She turned quickly in order to greet him, feeling relief—she could say yes! Lunch together! . . . And there was no Mr. Peter there. . . . Of all things! She looked over the entire huge hall. No Mr. Peter.

"To-night, what have I on for to-night?" Mr. Hutchins and she were slowly walking out with the throng.

"Those New York men invited you to dinner."

"Yes, yes, I'll go. Let them know, will you? . . . And you,—is there some one you could eat dinner with to-night, so as not to be alone?"

"I—I suppose so," Jenny said ruefully.

. . . Atlantic City wasn't much, really. Nothing. An old cold beach, an ugly old board walk, a lot of overdone and underdone hotels, foolish men bumping into each other and everybody else, men who thought they counted for something, and after all they amounted to nothing at all. If only she had been able to bring Steve and Alec. . . . She wanted Steve and Alec!

. . . My, that wind went right through a person. . . . Where was Steve's last letter? She'd read that again.

"DEAR MOTHER:—

"I am feeling fine I hope you are feeling fine Anyway I am feeling fine. We are having a fine time I hope you

are having a fine time too. We have grand things to eat I hope you have grand things to eat. Alec is a pretty good boy. Dear Mother I hope you are feeling fine I am feeling fine. This is all I can think of this time. Godby and lots of kisses

“Your loving son

“STEPHEN CAIRNS LAMAR.”

Was it going to rain? Where would she eat? There comes that automobile man. Dreadful bore.

“Why, Mrs. Lamar, all alone like this? Had lunch? I say, what luck! Come and have it with me!”

Jenny would rather starve to death. She was very sorry, she had a lunch engagement. No, she couldn't possibly break it. Yes, she had already made arrangements for dinner.

There goes that Merchant Marine man to the Transportation lunch. After all, he wasn't so smart. His talk had been a good deal of a bore. Everything at the meeting had been rather stupid. . . . What unattractive women Chamber of Commerce men married. What in the world did they cart them along to Atlantic City for? . . . She wouldn't eat in that hotel, she was sick of that hotel. She'd buy some chocolate and eat on the beach. However would he know now which meeting she would be going to this afternoon? How would they ever meet for that last swim? They wouldn't meet. There'd be no last swim. She'd never see him again as long as she lived. Well, and what of it?

She bought some peanuts, some foolish sugary buns, an ice cream soda. She didn't care if she did die. It wouldn't

be her fault. She had been ready enough to eat a decent lunch in a decent hotel.

She wrote some letters—cheerful things. She hated writing letters anyway. She wouldn't have thought he'd be that kind of man, to run off like that,—not a word. . . . After all, hadn't she been too enthusiastic about last night? She'd had just about as good times as that with other men. He wasn't so terribly much more interesting than other men. . . . He didn't do that jack-knife dive very well. . . . Really it was—rude. That's what it was, running off like that—*rude*. And that poem of Brooke's he liked—after all, that wasn't much of a poem. . . . Where was that foolish meeting on Machinery, anyway? . . . Upstairs in this very hotel. Not even a chance to get out and breathe a bit of fresh air. What a bore—cooped up all day! . . . What under the rising canopy of heaven would she do with herself after the meeting was over? . . . For dinner to-night? . . . After dinner? . . . Pshaw, she guessed she could go swimming by herself. The idea of thinking she had to hang around and wait for a rude man before she could go swimming! . . . Dinner. She'd show him! She'd wear her best blue dress and eat with that stupid automobile man, after all. Or that wholesale milk man who wanted her last night. Indeed if he, Mr. Peter, *did* ask her for dinner, she most certainly would refuse. As for dancing . . . She had her packing to do, and was tired after being up so late, so ridiculously late, last night. She'd go upstairs right after dinner. If he *did* ask her to dance with him she most certainly would refuse. He had made her feel foolish and idiotic in her own eyes—she hated him. To count on him

for lunch like that. It just showed, after all, there is no such thing as "woman's intuition." She'd always known it was nonsense. After last night—all morning—she would have sworn that he'd have been as anxious to have lunch with her as she with him. Was there anything in the world more humiliating? To have him just walk off like that. . . . She hoped she'd never see him again as long as she lived. . . . He bent his knees when he did that jack-knife dive. What a difference that made. . . . Just walked off—didn't even say good-by. For that matter he hadn't even said good morning. . . . What was that man talking about? Where was her program? The man next her lent her his. Some people in the world have manners. . . . What an awful voice. A man oughtn't to talk in public who has a voice like that. . . . My, what a close room. Why didn't some one open a window? . . . That was queer, not even to have said good morning. He had no scruples about asking her to dance that first time—and then couldn't even wait and say good-by. . . .

Mercy, was that man done at last? . . . Done already? Jenny Lamar! She hadn't taken a note. . . . Oh, dear, she could tell by the way this speaker began that he would never stop. Reading his paper, too. What a bore. There ought to be a law against reading papers. Light eyebrows. She hated men with light eyebrows. He didn't look as if he knew anything at all about machinery. He was saying nothing either she or Andrew Hutchins needed to know. She would write a letter to Steve and Alec.

The stirrings accompanying the end of one speech and the beginning of another. Stupid introductions. They

took as long as the speeches. . . . There was the chairman telling the same funny story she had heard six times since the convention began. Call it a by-product of the effects of standardization. To have to listen to the same funny story six times. She wouldn't listen. . . . Did the man next to her want to get out? Rude, just when a speaker was about to begin. Going up to the platform? . . . What . . . What! . . . Jenny Lamar! Mr. Peter—it was Mr. Peter! . . . Mr. Peter was talking. . . . She got hot all over. Her heart beat terribly. Her hands felt damp from perspiration. . . . She tried to take notes in shorthand and couldn't decipher her own efforts. She wrote longhand and could scarce recognize her own writing. . . . She would walk right out after the meeting and show him she was not in the least dependent on him for the pleasures of life. . . . He didn't talk so very well. . . . Frightfully nervous. What was there to be nervous about? Anyway, now she could easily find out what his name was. She didn't want to know what his name was. . . .

Back again in the seat next to her. "Thank God that is over! Let's not wait for the discussion. What do you say we go swimming as soon as this man is done?"

"That suits me!" said our Jenny, and felt all warm and happy and contented inside her. . . . Nice-looking man, this next speaker. . . . Reading his talk, but then, in a technical subject like machinery, it was just as well not to rely on notes alone. It was comfortable, sitting there like that, listening to papers. . . . Wasn't it good to see the sun! What a heavenly shade of blue the Atlantic Ocean was. And to end the day with a swim.

. . . Walking briskly down the board walk, she asked him, "Why did you disappear that way this morning?"

He laughed ever so little, and said finally, "Sort of human substitute for protective coloration."

"Too deep for me, Mr. Peter!"

"Anyhow, you see, I had to prepare that paper. They didn't let me know until this morning that I was to give it. I realized I needed every minute to work on that. I oughtn't to have gone to the morning session at all."

"Why did you, then?"

"Because I refused to face the fact that the human substitute for protective coloration is for the other person to run as fast as he can in the opposite direction. Instead I trailed along behind, and then I trailed along inside, and then—I sat down next to you, good and ashamed of myself."

"And now?"

"Oh, I never said I wouldn't go swimming!"

. . . He kept his knees stiff this time in the jack-knife dive.

On the board walk coming back he said practically nothing. He seemed uneasy. And all the time Jenny was thinking, "What about dinner to-night?"

Not realizing that every step of Mr. Peter's he was thinking: "What about dinner to-night? And after dinner? What about to-morrow and to-morrow night, and the next day, and the next night, and the next day, and the next night, and on . . . and on and on. . . ."

Does something more of a thing make getting along forever after without any of it at all, easier or worse?

Quite a question, that. Thomas Hatch would have answered one way. Mr. Peter answered another.

There are those in the world who wilfully choose to live their lives out along an even plane. They prefer foregoing all the peaks to risking the steep incline which may follow before they reach normal again. Their careers, plotted on a chart, would show a fairly even level from start to finish, a bit under average, or average. Just so-so lives.

Then there are those whose life lines, plotted, would look more like the Himalayas. Better to reach the highest point possible, even though it be paid for by the valley of the shadow afterwards. Anything but a uniformly low altitude! The everyday level—yes, the everyday level. That was where that was. A few degrees higher or lower. Every one lived most of his days along a level, differing only in degrees—comparatively slight degrees. The big contrast in human beings was the measure between the daily average and the peaks. At one extreme those who never reached a peak in all their span of days,—those cautious souls who always played safe, and lived low. Less cautious souls had here and there little—mounds. Slight deviations from the norm. Small pleasures of even and rounded outlines. . . . Up to those who flung all caution to the winds, reckoned on neither past or future, soared up and up, and then fell with a thud—a straight precipice on the other side of the summit. In the chasm at the bottom they might sigh, broken

though they be, "It was worth the fall!" Or they might twist and turn in their misery and moan, "Nothing was worth this!" Yet the next time they will have forgotten the dark steep canyon, or they remember, and yet remember still more vividly the glories of the peak, and they soar, and soar again!—and fall. At least there is no dead level to it. In between the two extremes—call it the philosophy that every great happiness is worth a great price, and anything is better than nothing. Though there is careful reckoning that the happiness is really great, and sure; the price, problematical. In contrast to those who always argue that the happiness is problematical, the price great, and sure.

" . . . Have you any engagement for dinner to-night?"

"No, none."

She thought it would be more fun not to go back to the hotel and dress, rather eat at some odd place on the board walk. . . . She really was not a bit hungry. He really was not a bit hungry. She disliked feeling so queer inside—so uneasy. It was difficult to talk. He did not seem to want to talk very much, anyhow. They discussed machinery, mildly; politics, mildly; children, mildly; vacations, mildly.

"Would you like to dance?"

"Would you?"

"Let's walk a bit first."

Arm in arm they walked from one end of the board walk to the other. Every minute counted. He was leaving early the next morning. There was a universe of things to talk about. Neither said anything. . . . Back the length of the

board walk again. . . . At the further end they leaned on the railing, arms still locked.

"This is foolish, Mr. Peter,—not saying anything at all."

"You see, we set a bad precedent. Last night, Mrs. Jenny, we were honest. Perhaps about some things, too honest. Now it is hard to talk to you without continuing in all honesty. I can't be honest about the thoughts which fill me to-night. I don't like 'made conversation.' Nothing in the world seems important to talk about except things I shouldn't talk about. . . . You understand everything in the world—I guess you understand that."

"I understand that. . . . You see, I told you you could always know that no matter what thoughts came into your head, you could say to yourself, 'That Jenny person would understand.' . . . More, perhaps, than just understand. . . . She might even have the same thoughts."

Must she always be learning difficult lessons? So. Mr. Peter had taught her the most upsetting one of all. It was possible for a man to come into your life and without his doing or saying anything, somehow one's world stood on end. The peaceful, well-ordered structure of yesterday, the universe one understood and counted on—a crumbled heap. What barrier of protection could be raised, when there was nothing tangible to guard against? Without knowing just how or when or where, there she stood a totally different Jenny Lamar from yesterday and the day before, last week. This was no turmoil of the kind Thomas Hatch inspired when he kissed her by that rock. Thomas Hatch never could have ruffled her soul one atom had he let her alone. Here was a man who had done nothing, said nothing—

nothing definite, nothing you could put your finger on. Yet her whole being trembled,—mind, soul, body. With what weapons did one fight against a state of affairs like this? They both would continue to say nothing, do nothing. What difference would that make? The harm was done.

And since the harm was done, what then was the sense in continuing to say nothing, do nothing? They were two philosophers who believed in the peaks, even though the valley on the other side were dark and steep. Jenny's gods held that the most should be made of every opportunity. . . .

Slowly they walked back to the hotel.

"I must go in and pack," she said wretchedly.

"I think I'll walk some more."

They stood by the florist window at the entrance. They looked at the flowers and saw nothing. Then they turned and looked at each other.

"Good night."

"Good night. . . . It's just as well we're never to see each other again . . . I suppose."

"I suppose . . . it is." She turned and went up the steps.

2

"Fine meeting last night, Mrs. Lamar, wasn't it?"

"Fine what?"

"Meeting—meeting. The Vice President certainly gave a splendid address. Secretary of the Treasury was good, too. Hope you took rather full notes."

"I—I didn't go to the meeting."

"*What*—didn't go? Why, it was *the* big meeting of the session."

"I forgot about it."

"I declare. . . . You look tired this morning. I've worked you too hard, after all, and I really did want you to have a rest. I'm sorry. . . . Worrying over the boys? You'll see them day after to-morrow!"

She listened to the last meeting of the convention, listened listlessly. She took some notes. She packed the last of her things.

They were on the train home-bound. "I tell you, a change does a man good, Mrs. Lamar. I feel like getting back on the job and jumping into things. I've no end of good ideas. The whole transportation problem looks much clearer to me now. Trucks—we must add to our trucks. . . . That accountant was a smart man,—we can make some improvements in the records and the financial statements. He's coming to look over things next month. Suppose we go over your notes, especially on Transportation."

3

A pair of pink slippers was found under one of the beds in 615. A toothbrush, tooth paste, and nail brush in the bathroom. An umbrella hung on the doorknob of the closet. When the chambermaid opened the closet, there hung a blue silk evening dress.

"P'r'aps they made a mistake downstairs. P'r'aps the party ain't left, after all."

She phoned to headquarters. Yes, 615 had checked out.

"Pity she wouldn't pack up before she left," the woman muttered as she collected Jenny's possessions. "I've seen 'em leave a few things behind, but not everything they own. . . . Easy to see what was the matter with *her*. Probably some guy she picked up on the board walk. 'Sall right for her—she prob'ly ain't got enough to keep her busy, anyhow. It's when you got a lot to do all day, like me, that a guy's got no business mixin' up in your affairs. Can't make a bed half decent no more. . . ."

4

It was after ten at night when Jenny neared home. The boys were in bed and asleep. Such excitement as there would be in the morning! They would kiss her and make a general commotion and she would kiss them and make a general commotion, just as if nothing had happened, just as if she were the same woman who had left them a week ago. . . . What did any one know of any one else in the world? We looked at people, people whom we knew well, and unless some cataclysmic event took place which every one was aware of, we all proceeded on the general assumption that our friends are this week as they were last, this month as last month, this year as last year. Most certainly children take it quite for granted that their parents are exactly the same year in, year out. What child thinks anything about it?

She opened the front door quietly with her own key so as to disturb no one—and there in the living room sat Jo,

from Department Twenty, Jo, whose wife made such good cake. And Jo was asleep. What was Jo doing at her house after ten o'clock at night?

He was not very sound asleep, but most decidedly embarrassed that he had been asleep at all.

"What's wrong, Jo? What do you want?"

"Mrs. Lamar, Mrs. Lamar, everything's wrong! I did want to see you and have a talk before you got to the factory to-morrow morning. . . . I don't know what we can do!"

He and Jenny Lamar had talked over the possibilities of "everything going wrong" three months ago. At that time Jo had declared: "I don't believe the Boss knows he's got red-blooded men and women workin' for him. He acts like we was a lot of clay."

"What makes you say that?"

"Look at how he treats us every time we want to get some little thing changed. Don't a life-sized man know once in a while what he needs to do his job decent? what ought to be done here and there to keep him from hatin' the sound of the factory whistle? I told you, for one thing, I got to get two experts to help me keep the machines in order. These new men! I tell you, every time a new man's a damn fool. He works hell all right with his machine. . . . What word does the boss send back, after I wait weeks for a chance to see him? Yes, he says, 'The foreman always used to manage to keep the machines runnin' all right without repair experts.' Course a man could, if only one new man come now and then. But new men's our

middle name. . . . Then you managed it somehow and we got two men. All that mess you and me had about payin' them! You knew all right you couldn't get no good men for that job in this city without their bein' union members, and bein' union men they had to get time and a half for Saturday afternoon work. And then they get fired and the machines go to pieces and the boss says no more fuss about it and the work gets spoilt and the men get their wages docked and get sore and the boss wants to fire me and it's you don't let him, I know. I know, too, the men ud walk out in my department if the boss fired me. I'm pretty near the only young foreman in the place. Gee, them old birds! What they don't know! They come over in the Ark, all right.

"And that's only my department. Every department's got a hundred things they're stewin' over. Nonsense, most of 'em are all right. But if a man's got an idea in his head, he's the last one to think it's not an important idea. He's sure of the importance of it jus' because it's in his own head. . . . Luko needs them safety appliances in his department,—boss says they cost too much. And he hires some bum professor or fancy guy of some sort to poke his nose around findin' out what's none of his business, payin' out good money to get some fool figures on routin'. Who cares about routin'?"

"Come back, Jo, you're off the track. You've no idea how necessary it was for Mr. Hutchins to hire that routing expert. Work was being held up dreadfully,—the old routing methods and the foreman came over in the same Ark."

"Well, it all looked suspicious to us men, all right."

Didn't Jenny know at the time it looked suspicious? When people get a bit out of sorts with conditions, anything can look suspicious. She had asked Mr. Hutchins if he wouldn't post notices or explain to the men somehow about the routing experts. Every man who knew there were experts at work was sure it was only some scheme to reduce, in the end, his pay envelope.

"It's none of their business! Do I have to stop and explain to a bunch of immigrants every plan I have in mind? I suppose you'll be wanting to send the whole factory to sit in on the Board of Directors' meeting next."

He never lost his temper—just scolded a bit now and then, or teased.

All the mass of detail she and Jo had talked over three months ago. No single thing vitally important in itself, the accumulation of all together looking more and more formidable: the drinking water, the stools, garbage cans for the end of the lunch period, Saturday afternoon work when the other factories were giving their workers, union men on the whole, a half holiday, discontent over irregularities in wage payment, the way a man never could count on his job—a foreman could fire him for any sort of small excuse,—and so on, and so on.

"And so, Jo, what's the upshot of it all?"

"The upshot's jus' this: Pete's got eleven departments pretty well organized. Emanuel's got four. They scrap like hell between themselves now, but wait till the Boss gives them one good excuse to get together—just one, and

the jig's all up. Everybody's sore. O' course, feeling like that, they're not gettin' out the goods. That makes them old foremen naturally scold like the devil. That makes the fellas sorer yet. 'Damn it, work!' old Turner hollers up and down his floor. Ain't a fella liftin' one finger more'n he has to. . . . This last week, the day you left, the report got around there'd be a cut in wages."

"It's not true, Jo, it's not true!"

"Well, that was the report. Some of the fellas went right to find out if it was true from you—there was a mob around your office that night—and you gone all week. All the things you settle in a week,—there wasn't nobody here all week to handle any of 'em. . . I don't want trouble, see? That's why I'm here. I been in two strikes already in my life and two's enough for me. A man can't lay nothin' by to carry him over strike times. . . . Pete he pretty near wants to kill me 'cause I won't talk strike. It ud be all right if you could quit workin' forever after a strike. But you got to get back at it again some day, and it jus' spoils all your feelin's about your job. It ain't never the same. . . . Hell, I'm gettin' good and sore on mine, anyhow. And then I go home and take it out on the Missus. . . . She don't make such good cake no more, these days. I tell her to cut out the cake business, anyhow; there's goin' to be trouble at the factory. Then she cries. She's been through one of them two strikes I been through. . . . Maybe our baby would a lived. . . .

"Well, I guess that's all, Mrs. Lamar. I'd better be goin'. I knew if any one could fix it, you could. But I'm 'most afraid it's too late to fix. Funny, one week of no

chance for anybody to blow off steam—what a damn difference it makes! I sure feel better for this talk. . . . Good night, Mrs. Lamar.”

5

Upstairs Jenny unpacked her things—such as she had remembered to pack, trying to think of Jo, trying to think of Steve and Alec. Out of one evening slipper there fell a little trickle of sand. It made a tiny mound on the white cover of her bed. She sat down, still holding the slipper in her hand, and looked at the sand. The tears came. Why use up a lot of energy she didn't have, anyhow, trying to stop them? She flung herself face downwards on the bed. . . . One week ago she, the joyous Jenny, had sobbed beside this bed for the loneliness of forever living without Billy. To-night, between her sobs, she whispered, “Oh, Peter, oh, Mr. Peter!” In her heart she knew that if Billy could have heard, Billy would have understood.

CHAPTER XVI

I

"I'M afraid to raise prices again. Then look at that statement, Mrs. Lamar, and tell me if there is anything on earth to be done but lower wages."

"That's the solution of a tired man, Mr. Andrew Hutchins. Tired, or stupid. You're not stupid."

"Tired? Tired of this game? . . . I've been at it since before you were born, right at this desk. . . . If I'd found things working all right when I got back from Atlantic City . . . I got a new breath of life down there. But to come back to troubles, and more troubles . . . No, no,—I'm not so tired. . . . But still I ask you, what is there to do but lower wages?"

"Whew, how many times have we talked this over! There are times when a man's justified in lowering wages. You're not, because there are other ways you can change the look of that sheet, and you know it, for I've told you often enough. What will it look like next month if you try reducing wages now? . . . And yet, it's all gone so far . . . my old solution doesn't sound so very smart any more. How increase production when the whole spirit is for every man and woman to get out as little work as ever they can? . . . A year ago—oh, what couldn't have been done a year ago!"

"Well then, reduce wages."

"And you have a strike on your hands. It may cost you in cold money more than ever you'll gain in wage reductions. And in morale—what it will cost your end, and the men's end, in morale! This factory will never be the same. . . . But what's the morale now, anyhow? . . ."

"Goodness, Mrs. Lamar, never before did I hear you sound discouraged. I'm the one to play that tune, not you."

"I am discouraged. How long have I had to sit here and see things go from bad to worse, when for months and months and months I could have turned the tide, had you but had faith in me. If I'd been a man, maybe you would have listened. All along there have been enough of the men themselves who knew what to do to help solve our troubles, only you'd never let me make definite use of their views and experiences. A lot of them don't know black from white, I'll grant you. They're the ones who help swell the following of the discontented who do know black from white—one shade of gray from another shade. . . . If you had let me put Emanuel and Pete and some six or seven others on a factory committee a long while ago, you'd not recognize this place to-day. What we all together could have done!"

"Put 'em on then!"

"Yes, 'put 'em on then.' In the first place, they wouldn't be put now. A nice picture they'd make in the eyes of their followers! They've been preaching for all this time that everything was rotten, and the only way anything can be fixed is through the A. F. of L. and the I. W. W. and

a grand strike. Imagine them sitting on a committee whose object was peaceably to improve conditions. Not Pete and Emanuel! . . . And in the second place, when you say 'put 'em on then' in that tone of voice, no good could ever come of it. You'd have to feel some interest, have some faith."

"I tell you, what we ought to have done all along is fire Pete and Emanuel. It's not too late now."

"It was always too late to fire Pete and Emanuel if what you wanted was to save yourself trouble. You don't imagine Pete and Emanuel alone and unaided could make much of a fuss, do you? Had you fired them, there'd have been Charley Davis and Sulzy to take their places, and then two more, and then two more, for every 'agitator' you got rid of. Pete and Emanuel could have made little headway unless there really were things wrong. Firing those two men would only have convinced the other discontented workers that conditions were as bad as they thought. Other agitators would have kept up their agitation for them."

"Pete's a crook."

"Maybe he is. There's no love lost between Pete and me. He regards me as his greatest stumbling block. I don't think he's really a crook."

"I'm going to fire him. I'm going to fire Emanuel. I'm going to reduce wages."

"What will you use, strike breakers?"

"There won't be a strike. You just think there'll be a strike."

"And if there is a strike?"

"We'll wait till the time comes."

"It's summer, you know. Men aren't so easy to get."

"We'd find plenty."

". . . Mr. Hutchins, when did you have a vacation last? Not—not Atlantic City. I mean a real vacation."

"Vacation? I don't know. Why? . . . Vacation. . . . I—why, I've never had a real vacation. How could I?"

"I wish you'd take one. Mrs. Hutchins and I both wish you'd take one."

"What's the matter? You don't think I need a vacation, do you? I guess I never was in better condition. Tired, that's all. Anybody gets tired."

"You ought to have a vacation before you have a strike. A tired man doesn't do very well with a strike."

"I guess I can do as well as your Pete and your Emanuel. It's no harm if a man's tired. . . . Who wouldn't get tired, running a factory where there are so many things going wrong? I come back with a lot of fine new plans, all held up because production keeps falling off and there's no money to do anything with. . . . I'd like to fire the whole factory. I'd be glad if they would strike. . . . We'd close down. . . . Get a vacation . . . real vacation."

"What would the Board of Directors say if you closed down?"

"Let them say. . . . I'm tired of the mess. . . . Don't care what they say." Andrew Hutchins dropped his gray head in his hands.

"Mrs. Lamar!" Suddenly he wheeled around and looked at Jenny. "I'm not tired. It's not that. I'd never give up the game, really I wouldn't. Nobody could get me out of

this job. My brother and I made this business! . . . But I'm sixty-eight years old next month. The little wife isn't very strong any longer. She's been wanting to get over to Europe now for the last thirty years. Yes, sir, thirty years she's been telling me, 'What's the good of it all if we don't ever go any place? see anything?' I always said: 'Go? We go some place almost every night!'—Not really that often, you know. But she'd say: 'I don't mean that. I mean—Venice! Vienna! Paris! . . .' Shucks, America's good enough for me. But—well, a trip might help us both. . . . Mrs. Lamar, what do you say? . . . I declare, it sort of startles me. What do you say I—well, not exactly resign, but—well, make way for a new man, a younger man? It's about time I let some one else have a turn."

Jenny sat speechless. What would it all mean? She had visioned herself working for Mr. Hutchins as long as he lived,—she really never could have deserted him. But the last six months—it had nearly taken the heart out of her. He could not understand what was going on. . . . What a state to leave a factory in! And yet what a necessary time to get in new blood! . . . And she, Jenny Lamar. . . . She could find a new job, some place . . . any old place, she didn't much care. . . . Any old thing. . . . Since Atlantic City . . .

"I'll go right home this minute and tell the little wife that after waiting thirty years she can go to Europe. . . . I declare, I don't see how I could get along, even in Europe, without you to lean on, Mrs. Lamar. I say, would you—would you like to come along?"

What a mixture of emotions a question could raise. Eu-

rope—Venice, Vienna, Paris!—oh, Jenny Lamar, who would see every corner of the world! London, Berlin, Rome! . . . Steamers, trains, automobiles! . . . Alps, Rhine, Scotch lakes! . . . Steve and Alec—just walk off and leave Steve and Alec,—wouldn't that be a fine way to do? Drag them along,—so peaceful for everybody, so good for Steve and Alec. . . . And Jenny Lamar, imagine wasting any money showing you anything any place any more. In the center of Paris you would but see the moon on the Atlantic Ocean; on the Grand Canal in Venice it would be one hunger for the Board Walk of Atlantic City. . . . It might help you forget, Jenny Lamar. . . . Jenny Lamar does not want to forget. . . . There were gods whose pet she was, old gods young gods. . . . They loved her too much to have let something like that come into her life, and then snatch it away forever. There were times when you knew the last of a thing was the last of a thing. There were other times. . . . Venice, Vienna, Paris—they were so far away from—everything.

"How now, Mrs. Lamar? Come along and make the little wife and me happy!"

"Thank you, oh, thank you more than I can say, Mr. Hutchins, but—I can't."

"Well, no hurry. Think it over. . . . Imagine my taking a real vacation. . . . Some younger man. . . . It's not that I'm too old. . . . I'm really hardly tired, either, hardly tired at all. But the little wife ought to see Europe, after waiting thirty years, now oughtn't she, Mrs. Lamar?"

"She surely ought!"

To wait thirty years for anything you wanted very, very

much. Thirty years! . . . One *could* wait thirty years for Europe. . . .

2

It was some six weeks later that Mr. Hutchins asked, "And what, Mrs. Lamar, is precisely the situation now?"

"The new manager was informed by letter—I wrote quite pages—that the strike was on, and just how matters stood,—the long letter you signed. He answers he is quite agreeable to taking over a factory when a strike is on—may it not be a case of fools rush in. . . . But"—and here Jenny smiled—"he seems strongly to object to a female assistant manager. Just read that letter you are to sign on your desk now, in which you tell him what a very nice assistant manager Mrs. Lamar is, how competent, how long at the job, how able to handle the labor situation! Oh, I gave myself many a bouquet. He's got to get along with me. The audacity of him—objecting to me at all!"

"So . . . Wednesday Mrs. Hutchins and I leave. She persists in being fearful. After wanting a thing thirty years she now thinks she'd rather go to California and play with the grandchildren. Says ten years ago she was too old for Venice, Vienna, Paris. Women are peculiar. But she must see the world—she always used to want to see the world."

"I can feel for Mrs. Hutchins a little. You hand her Europe ten—twenty years too late. You hand me labor one—two years too late. Doesn't your conscience hurt you at all?"

"All things in their time. A man must never make up

his mind hastily. See how I've speeded up. Thirty years it took me to surprise Mrs. Hutchins with Europe, less than two to surprise you with labor!"

"And I'm thinking she'll find a good bit of Europe in pretty much the state I find labor. Good luck to both of us!"

". . . Sunday night supper then?"

Why could she not throw wide her arms and call: "I, Jenny Lamar! Assistant Manager!" A year ago her dreams had never reached as far as this reality. She had never visioned herself with as much authority as the Board of Directors had endowed her with. She had never thought she would be able in all her life to earn as much money as the amount Mr. Hutchins informed her was her new salary. Everything was in a fearful mess, true, but that, now that she had real authority, only made the new job look more interesting. It was no fun to preserve order. The Adventure was to bring order out of chaos. At first she was to play the old rôle of secretary to the new head, but in a few weeks she was to have her own office and her own secretary. Whom had she discovered for that very job but Anabelle Browne of the old Hastings days. Anabelle had gotten track of her again, had come all the way from Chicago to look her up the very day Jenny got her new appointment. Anabelle didn't care about salary or hours. "Jenny Joslin, I'd work for you for nothing!"

Yet there was no spirit in her this Sunday to call, "I, Jenny Lamar!" The young gods—how good they were being to her, what an opportunity they were putting in her

way. Assistant Manager, two thousand men, when they were on the job. Imagine Mr. Hutchins having faith after all. Yes, her very new, very young, upright gods,—thank You, thank You. Only there was no toss of the head, no smile, no kiss to heaven. . . . The old, old thousands of years old gods, and Jenny,—just they and Jenny knew why. There was more of Jenny going back one hundred thousand years, perhaps, than some thirty years. Whatever it was—yes, it was nice to be assistant manager. Billy would have been proud.

Jenny, Jenny, the nonsense of that! As if, were there any Billy to be proud, you ever, ever would have become assistant manager to anybody or anything, except Billy. She could, by the skin of her teeth as it were, manage to bring up two boys and be assistant manager. At least the boys were showing no ill effects as yet. But to be a wife, and assistant manager at the same time. . . . I wonder, Jenny Lamar. A wife, yes, if it were somebody you didn't love very much for a husband. But if you were very, very much in love, so that you—well, the way you feel when you are very, very much in love. How about it? What kind of assistant manager would you make? What kind of wife? Off early mornings. Yes, that part of it was all right. Work all day. Yes, that part of it might be all right. Home tired, dog-tired, evenings. How about that? He would come home dog-tired evenings too,—he took business that way, did Mr. Peter. *Who?* Caught, Jenny Lamar!

Yes, caught. Caught and caught and caught again. What was the use of pretending to oneself?

But it showed just how much real sense those old gods had. They managed it so that she was perfectly miserable—they won out that far. They succeeded in handicapping the new young gods to that extent. Miserable she was, and that was all they had to show for their pains. What was the wisdom of that? Nobody won out. The new gods pushed her on and on to where she needed all the ability and energy she possessed to do her job well. The old hundreds of thousands of years old gods saw to it that she danced with a man at Atlantic City, and sat on the beach with a man, and swam, and ate dinner, and walked the board walk from end to end, and from end to end again, and then—they just deserted her. Small comfort she was now to the new gods, in her present state of mind. What good was she doing the old? Unless, indeed, they loved misery.

3

“Mrs. Lamar, good evening, good evening! Thought you had forgotten supper. Excuse me one moment—the telephone. Go right in the living room and meet the new Manager.”

The Beloved Butler opened the heavy living-room doors. A man stood by a table looking over a clutter of papers. He turned at the sound of some one entering. Jenny put out one hand to steady herself against a chair.

Mr. Hutchins finished his telephoning, the butler opened the heavy doors again. As he glanced in the living room Jenny Lamar was standing in the identical spot and in

the identical position as when he closed the doors after her minutes ago. The man was in exactly the same position by the table. Butlers are experienced people and understand a great deal in the world, but not everything. Some situations puzzle even butlers.

"Well, well, folks—sorry to have run off like that. My, my, just standing here waiting to be introduced? Didn't realize you were so formal. The new manager, Mr. Cairns, the Assistant Manager, Mrs. Lamar,—shake hands!"

The new manager took about three steps forwards, the new assistant manager three steps.

"Here, here, this will never do! Just because Mr. Cairns objected to a woman assistant manager and the woman assistant manager knows he objected, there's no reason to hold off like this. I'm—I'm embarrassed! . . . There, that's better. If you two find it perhaps a little difficult to get started, I can promise you both you'll be doing famously together in no time at all. Women assistant managers on the whole may be objectionable, Mr. Cairns, but not—not Mrs. Lamar. . . . Ah, here's the little wife. Always packing!"

Mr. Hutchins may have felt somewhat disappointed during supper. He had hoped to cover much ground. He and Philip Cairns had progressed splendidly all afternoon. Perhaps, after all, he would find it difficult getting along with Mrs. Lamar. Unthinkable! Any one could get along with Mrs. Lamar. Too bad, however, this first night, when he was so anxious for her to make a good impression, she seemed so—no, you surely could never call Mrs. Lamar nervous.

Interesting, though, how it turned out that they had known each other somewhat, years ago.

"Are you by any chance any relation to Dr. Stephen Cairns?" Mrs. Lamar had asked him.

Dr. Cairns was his father.

"You're Philip then—Philip Cairns! I remember when I was very small indeed and boasted one very mild and modest curl over one ear—how proud I was of it! You were a great big boy with a knife, and you cut that curl off! . . . I named my first boy after your father. He was a great friend of my mother's. I loved him very much."

But Philip Cairns did not remember little Jenny Joslin. He had moved away when she was at altogether too uninteresting an age for a boy of twenty.

Queer that after having named her boy after his father, Mrs. Lamar several times got Cairns' name wrong at supper. That wouldn't help matters any. Called him "Mr. Peter." Nothing in the least like "Cairns." Not like Mrs. Lamar to make such a slip as that.

Also he had hoped they could talk business all evening. It was surprising to have Mrs. Lamar say by nine-thirty that she must be going. Mr. Cairns would surely stay on and work.

"May I just see Mrs. Jen—Mrs. Lamar home first? I could if necessary come back."

"No need to see Mrs. Lamar home, Mr. Cairns. My car always takes her home evenings."

"I'd—rather prefer to walk to-night, if you don't mind."

"So? Well, you two may get a chance to talk over

matters on the way. Yes, yes. By the by, Mrs. Lamar, Mr. Cairns was at the Atlantic City Convention! If we'd only known it we could all have gotten acquainted down there. . . . Fine speech the Vice President made that last night, wasn't it, Cairns?"

"I didn't hear it. I missed that meeting."

"Now think of that! Best talk of the Convention. Mrs. Lamar missed it too. . . . See you later then this evening, Cairns."

They walked a block without a word. Then Philip Cairns said, "One more minute in that room, Mrs. Jenny, and I'm dead sure I'd have gone crazy."

"I was so afraid you might not say you'd take me home. I had to see you alone."

"It is all the irony of fate, Jenny Lamar. Sometimes I think there must be gods determined to have things turn out a certain way regardless. When Hutchins first wrote me about this job I was in a desperate state. It was about a month after Atlantic City, and all I could think of day and night was you. How could I take on new work? I determined to stay where I was, nor did the interview with Hutchins alter my decision. Then came the news of the strike. Suddenly that looked like my life-saver. Things will be in such a mess, I said; I'll have to work like such a dog to get matters clear and going again, there'll be no time to think. First it will mean an uprooting, a change. Secondly it will mean the hardest work I ever had to do in my life. Between the two, per-

haps I can forget that there ever was such a place as Atlantic City."

"But I didn't want to forget!"

"Of course—real forgetting. No, I never could forget, that way, had I wanted to. But if there is a certain situation which has daily to be faced, what is there but eternal misery in remembering—too vividly?"

"And here we are—you and I who were never to see each other again."

"Here we are."

"What are we going to do about it, Mr. Peter?"

"All evening just that one question kept going through and through my brain: 'What are we going to do about it? . . .' Shall we be as honest as we were that night on the beach, and really talk it all out? Or shall we beat around the bush?"

"Be honest! Let's forever and forever be honest! People can only beat around the bush who see each other seldom. We have to labor side by side, day in, day out. Certainly the sooner we face the issue the better."

"After all there's little to say. You know I love you. I'm married. . . . There now, I seem to have come to the end already."

"And I. . . . You know I love you. You're married. . . . After all, those are merely statements of fact. Much more difficult is to figure out a practical relationship. Perhaps we can come to no conclusions in one night. . . . And yet I feel we must decide something before we leave each other this evening. No more walking up and down a board

walk saying nothing—that only does when you think you're ending a situation, not when you face a new beginning. . . . To-night, a hundred times, I felt I'd have to give up the factory. I wonder if I *can* work alongside of you. . . . Sometimes, since Atlantic City, I've wondered if I could work any more at all. It's made such a difference. . . . I've always had a theory that a man could work and be in love at the same time,—often he works even harder for being in love. But a woman—I don't know. It seems to make another being out of the woman. It's one fight—one fight to keep at what is in front of you to do."

"I can't bear that thought,—that I've made your life any harder for you! I'll give up my new job in a second, and go back—away—if you say the word, if it would make things any easier for you."

"But it wouldn't! It would just be worse. You see—if I'm to continue being honest—I shall tell you that nothing in the world makes me so happy as to be with you. I knew that at Atlantic City. The thing that dragged me down so was not the being in love so much as just the hunger—the longing to have you around."

"Don't you think I know!"

"And here you are! Now we're really getting down to the problem we have to work out. When you are around, this way, it is as if suddenly I was in my garden again. . . . You don't know about my garden, where I live, almost always. The way the sun shines there! The flowers—countless flowers in masses of color, birds . . . and in the distance a blue lake. My soul's garden. I love it so. I'm so at home there. Once I couldn't reach it again

for some time—and everything in me rebels at the dark, and being cooped up. Off and on since then something has happened to dim my sun—clouds, only clouds. Some darker than others. But always they pass, and there's my sun again, my garden of colors and fragrance and song. My soul, singing.

"Since Atlantic City—I don't know. It has been so strange. Always a feeling that if I could just reach my garden again it would be more beautiful than ever. I'd lost my way. Never could I find it again, alone. I was done forever with ever wanting to be in that garden by myself. It was never meant in the first place to be enjoyed just by myself. Yet I had been enjoying it that way, just the same. Because nothing in me let me stay away from it. Almost without my having anything to do with it, my soul always got me back there. My soul will have the sun!

"Since you left that evening, even my soul seemed to say, 'I can't find the way.' When we said good night that last time, we shut some door to my garden. My soul and I together said: 'There's no use searching for the key—he has it. If ever he comes again, he'll have the key with him. He and I shall stand among those flowers together. I never want to stand there again alone.' . . . To-night, when I entered that living room and knew it was you, it was like suddenly seeing the sun, after being lost in the dark. I stood in my garden again, with you, with you! And the wonder and glory of it hurt. I could not move. . . . Yet part of me longed to rush to you."

"And I, Jenny. . . . Not part of me. Everything in me

wanted to take you in my arms. . . . I wonder how long the two of us just stood there. There is no measuring such time. Clocks were never invented for that sort of reckoning. I seemed to live a whole life in those moments, and yet not to live at all."

"So then, don't ever talk of helping me by going away. If you only knew how my soul hates the dark . . . No, the problem to work out is, how much can we let ourselves be together, and have it harm no one else? Where's your family?"

"I'm alone here, at least for the present. I had expected to move Mrs. Cairns and Nancy with me, of course. Everything was ready. The last thing she decided against coming, until later. The excitement of packing was too much for her. Then the thought of leaving her home where she had lived since she was born . . . suddenly she felt she couldn't. Her father's health is very poor. She asked to be allowed to stay home until I got settled here and could get a house in readiness. She prefers to wait until early winter. . . . Whom then could it harm, our seeing each other all we could?"

"Nobody, nobody! Oh, the wonderful world—our world! The marvelous times we shall have, just being together! Never did I think I could feel so happy again. . . . You'll learn to know my boys, and they you. How I've longed for just that! To love again, just to love again with all my heart—and to be loved. . . . That is really, really what my garden's for!"

"You, to love 'again,' Jenny. For me,—this is all new for me. I seem to be living for the first time in my life,

except Atlantic City. . . . Yet, in the midst of the wonder of it, there is such uneasiness that comes over me. What right have I to take your love? Useless to ask, What right have I to love you? I could no more help that than I could help breathing. Always, always I shall love you. But for you to love me. . . . I'm not free. I feel like a caged animal. I tramp back and forth, back and forth—there's no opening. My loving you, having you near, your loving me,—it is as if suddenly, instead of a little cage, I had woods and fields to roam in—your garden, if you will. And yet, though through you my world has broadened until I know it no more—it's still a cage. There is still no opening, and I imprison you with me, when I take your love."

"So easy is that to answer, so easy. In the first place, there is nothing you or I can do about it. Like you, I can no more help loving you than I can keep my heart from beating. And secondly—Mr. Peter, remember this forever and ever—I should far rather be imprisoned with you in a cage without an opening than roam the whole world over, free and alone. You see a cage with you—a cage with iron bars—really it is my garden. . . . So long has it been, so long, since I could blow my kiss to heaven. Thank You, God, for Mr. Peter's cage!"

CHAPTER XVII

I

"THAT'S the way of it. People give you 'full authority,' and what it is apt to mean is, full authority as long as you do only what those same people approve of. I know just what I want to do. I haven't an idea that won't work. But the first step is recognition of the union. How can we build a new spirit, a new working morale, on bitterness? I say, settle the strike by recognizing the union. That means the men can feel at once that they are victors, and return to the job in such frame of mind as victory inspires. 'Good world after all.' What is the alternative? Fight till we break the union, and start the new era on a basis of bitterness."

"Did you explain it that way to the Board of Directors?"

"All the way to New York I went, and I explained it that way. I guaranteed that it would be no time, reckoned you know in decades, with my new plans before we would have incorporated all the good phases of the union into factory labor management. We'd have our Factory Board composed of workers only, and such standing committees as they chose to appoint to handle details,—wages, complaints, working conditions, hiring and firing, production, recreation,—anything else they think of; a Board of Man-

agers where a smaller elected number of workers and you and I and the treasurer act on the recommendations of the Factory Board and handle the universe in general. . . . I didn't go into details—they looked too bored and unencouraging."

"I should think they'd have looked a bit alarmed."

"No, they didn't flatter me enough to look alarmed. Alarmed. . . . Why, what I am above all else is safe—the safest thing in the factory, if they only knew it. With my plans in full swing, what soil could the unhappy features of unionism find in which to flourish? Indeed it's not the Board of Directors who should get out of sorts with me,—it's Pete and his kind. They'll have to hustle like mad to turn out better citizens via the straight fighting union method than I'll turn out via my method. . . . I got so excited with the wonders of what I could do—I know I must have looked like a small-sized Walkure swooping down on those agonized Directors. 'My job is to make that factory a success, a hundred per cent success,' I blustered. 'I don't care anything about their old unions as such. If they can turn out real men faster than without unions, then unions are surely better than no unions. But they're getting all mixed up and forget half the time what they are really about and bicker and squabble and do more harm than good. (Of course they nodded sage approval at such statements.) We'll do everything in our factory a union can do, and do it better. Wait till you see the type of worker we have in three years' time! Wait till you see how they hang onto their jobs! (In comparison, I should have added!) Wait till you see how they labor,

how they whistle at their work! Wait till you see how healthy they are, how contented! Wait till you see how production jumps, how profits increase, how prices can come down, how wages can go up! All that I guaranteed—I, Jenny Lamar! Oh, I felt like Napoleon. It's that Board of Directors will be my Waterloo, not the workers. I promised too much in my excitement—I ran away with myself, trying to sell my idea. There they sat, nine of them, gray-haired, pompous men all of whom undoubtedly have beautiful butlers."

"And the upshot?"

"The upshot! They might as well have sent me to Elba then and there. They give me six months to show results. Six months! Things getting in a mess for ten years at least, two thousand workers, and I'm to show results in six months. Two years, I cried, is the minimum! Six months, the hirers of the beautiful butlers repeated. I wanted to drop all nine of them in the Hudson."

"Six months is better than nothing."

"But it isn't. They'll be able to nod their gray heads and say, 'Aha, we told you so!' and then they'll lock up their brains once more and never again will any one be able to get a forward-looking labor idea in their heads. They'll nod wisely and say, 'Yes, yes, we tried that all once.' . . . But I saw New York, Mr. Peter! Only—it was no fun at all, really it wasn't, without you. Everything I looked at, everything I did . . . bah, it was all the same. Always, 'If Peter were only here!' I tried to get excited over things I'd longed all my life to see, and the better the thing looked which I gazed upon, the more I

wanted you. . . . The boys said they had a wondrous time with you while I was gone."

". . . And now what?"

"First, we recognize the union,—how it hurt that Board finally to give in on that! They'd already agreed to let wages stand for the present. Then, then, that committee I've longed these months and months to appoint! Emanuel on it. . . ."

"And Pete, what about Pete?"

"And Pete on it. Pete as a Conquering Hero may prove very constructive, whereas Pete as 'Agitator' is a hundred per cent trouble-maker. Then, after plans are fairly well laid, a meeting of the two thousand. Ha, that will be fun! One thousand nine hundred will sit like bumps on a log. They'll be suspicious,—alas, maybe even bored. Pete will make a speech, Emanuel, Michael,—oh, I've got it down cold. Pete can say it's all the work of his union, Emanuel can say it was his and the I. W. W.'s doings. Any one can say anything. Then we'll have an election by departments. That committee will be the one to really start things going. . . . I'm biding my time to see if Pete will be elected to that committee. . . . My job is to let every man and woman of the two thousand know that the whole thing is absolutely on the square. But it's up to us all to see if we can show the Board of Directors in six months that we really are fit to begin to handle our own affairs. With the union recognized, I have a right to tell the men it's up to them to make good as union men, else any one will have a right to say that what the union aims for is not the welfare of industry as a whole, but its own limited

squabbly interests. . . . Well, we're off. 'We'll show the world!' I have sessions with Pete and Emanuel this afternoon."

2

Five months later.

"You see, my Mr. Peter, they really and honestly aren't giving me a real six months even. If that Board would keep its hands off for six months! Of course I have to spend some money! When they gave me only six months, naturally I have to try to crowd in everything I can in that time and take no chances on where I'll be when the six months are up. Otherwise we could spread out some things over a couple of years, if necessary. . . . The men want a decent place to have their committee meetings. How would the Board of Directors like to meet in a cold basement or in a corner where you can't hear yourself think for the noise of machinery? They should have a room, more than one. There's all the third floor, where those cutters stand. We don't use that floor any more,—we could do wonders with it. The men and women want a place to eat, instead of sitting about on boxes or stools at the machines where they work all day. The start of a lunch room could be arranged on the third floor. We've had the drinking-water problem tackled by experts—it can all be settled beautifully. (Strange how little objection labor has to those suspicious 'experts' when they do the hiring of the experts themselves.) The Board sees only money going out. It will be several years before it comes

back in morale and output. So—they've put their eighteen beautiful feet down on my budget. The logic of them: 'When production looks favorable enough to warrant increased expenditure, I can proceed slowly with certain of my plans.' I'd like to pull the gray hairs right out of their heads. The men vote for certain things, we here agree,—and then that Board says the effect has to precede the cause. . . . Peter, Peter, is there anything that breaks a body's heart like having one's dreams held up? . . . And yet isn't it a lark, fighting away like this?"

"And one last month to go, Jenny."

"One last month. Why, we've used up five months just getting used to the feel of our own legs. . . . I wish the men had elected Pete to the Board of Management. Pete's the kind who is only of use as a victor. He was fine on that first committee—really had some ideas. But you see when it came right down to his own department, Jo had the men, and Pete didn't. But by a mighty narrow margin. So Pete is back at his old job of making trouble. The Factory Board is actually considering firing him,—they have the sole power. They think they have enough facts to warrant action. But first I'm going to put it up to Pete. . . .

"Manager Man, at least I don't have to convert you to anything. You're almost too easy, you and Anabelle Browne. Everything I say satisfies you two."

". . . Jenny, it really does go wonderfully, working together side by side, doesn't it? Never did I know a mortal could be so happy. I get up singing every morning. And our evenings together—oh, our evenings!"

"Don't you like my garden, Mr. Peter? To think you didn't know there was such a sun, such flowers! After all, it isn't being in love which keeps people from working. It's being unhappy. If a person is in love, he is unhappy away from the person he loves. But here we are, working day in, day out, and nights, together. Could anything be more wonderful? . . . I've let the rest of the world rather slide away. Just you, the boys, the factory. All in my rose-scented garden, my garden of song. . . ."

3

"Peter, Mr. Peter, you look worried this morning. What is it?"

"Mrs. Cairns and Nancy get here in two days, Jenny. The telegram was waiting when I got home late last night from our walk."

The clouds covered the sun, the petals of the flowers closed, the birds ceased their singing, a cold breeze blew.

". . . Mrs. Hutchins had written her from Europe that she was not well and could not return as soon as expected, and we should occupy their house until we can get settled."

He made little pencil marks all over a freshly typed letter. The clock ticked on and on. Jenny finally felt able to walk to the door and into her own office.

Jo was waiting there.

"You're not sick, Mrs. Lamar?"

"No. What can I do for you?"

"I came to report on Pete. We decided five to four to fire him. He was notified last night. He knows he can

appeal his case, but he says he won't. I wish something would get Pete out of this town. There's trouble in his eye all right. I can't figure out what he's plannin' on, but it's no good, whatever it is. . . . Of course it's made a lot of feelin'. Pete's pretty strong with the men. If we could have about a month or so to let the matter blow over, but, good Lord, Mrs. Lamar, in two weeks the six months is up and it looks like we might be in the thick of the mess in two weeks. We had to fire Pete,—he was makin' trouble all the time. He'll make still more for a little while, but we can explain it to the men. The Board's willin' to resign and have a new election if there's too much rumpus."

"I want to have about half an hour to think it over. Thank you, Jo."

In a garden, in the midst of sunshine and flowers, anything, everything looked possible. That garden, indeed, knew no such word as "fail." In the cold damp grayness of this morning—what a chaos the factory situation was in! What a great mass of immovable weight most of two thousand workers were. Did they really care for anything on earth outside of their pay envelopes? And Pete, what did Pete have up his sleeve? Perhaps it was all no job for a woman anyhow. What was a woman good for anyway? Why should a person be tired at nine o'clock in the morning? . . . Unending nights stretching ahead, unending nights of loneliness. . . . She could go to a party again now and then. All of a sudden the old feeling of the years back came over her, that sensation of being once more cut in two. This time there was no bleeding, no rawness.

Just that half of her ached so, and half a person—what is half a person? Half a person can't work, can't go to parties or anything else, shrinks from people. Instead there is just a tottery unbalanced feeling, as if always you must hold on to something or you would fall altogether. Hold on to what?

4

"But, Jenny, I can't face it. I'm not strong enough to let myself imagine what life would be like, not seeing you. You asked before, what harm could it do, our being together all we could. It harmed no one. And now, what harm would it do now? The thousand and one things I must talk over with you—we get no chance here in the office, interrupted as we are. The reading we did, the walks we took, the—the just being together. You taught me what life could really mean. And just the joy of it all—the unending joy of it! I tell you I can't face doing without it!"

"We've got to face it. All I know is, the whole situation is altered, now that your family is coming to-morrow. Something inside me won't let me go on, that's all. The joy would be gone. . . . I'd see her sitting home alone. . . . Never!"

"But she has to go to bed at nine o'clock every night. What harm would it do to see you after nine?"

"Harm? I don't know just exactly what *harm*. All I know is I *can't*. It seems now as if it might be even more

misery than not seeing you at all. . . . If she were well and strong, and had pleasures and friends and interests of her own—that would make a difference. I go striding about creation so healthy I don't know I have a body at all. It seems to put me on my honor not to take advantage of her."

"You don't understand. When I can be with you, talk with you, read with you, play with you,—love you—I'm a ten times better and more useful man. I could be a much more valuable husband the hours I was home—and I'd be home all the time that she ever could possibly need me."

"I can't reason it out. I don't know the logic of it. Perhaps I just let myself forget her altogether up till now. You were mine! My Peter, mine, mine, mine! Suddenly—you belong to her."

"But I don't, I don't! I am a thousand times more yours. Jenny, you can't say that I'm not to see you!"

"I say just that—yet I don't know how we can live, either of us, and carry it through. You see, if you were just a friend—then it would make no difference at all to me, whether she were in town or not. I'd see you—why, any time I felt like it. But this way . . . Of course there's the office here, and lunch now and then, and once in a great while—oh, she'd not mind if you came just once in a great while! No, no! If there is something inside of me that won't let me go on seeing you—Peter, Peter, there's something inside of me that won't, can't, let me altogether abide by what that other something decides! No, no, I can't give you up altogether! Peter—my Peter. . . ."

5

"Jenny, you worry me so these days. You look half dead."

"Don't you bother about me, Anabelle Browne, I'm all right. Something is going strangely, though, among the men, something in the air. Jo and Michael are both trying to find out for me what it is. I don't like the way things look."

"You need a rest."

"Rest nothing. Maybe the Board of Directors will give me one! The kindness of them: they've allowed me a month's extension of time. I plead for a year and I get a month."

"Mr. Cairns is feeling pressure from all sides, I guess you know, on the union question. The other employers are saying he's got to withdraw union recognition. He's showing the signs of the fight too."

"Don't I know it! The New York people wrote to him behind my back on that union issue. I won't lift a finger to do away with the unions. I ask only for a chance to let the workers prove to themselves that, seeing the world at present is what it is, they can make something better for themselves, at least for the present, better for the industry on which so much of their welfare depends. I hate the harassment and uncertainty unions bring. They do keep us all uneasy, and uneasiness is an unprofitable soil for the flourishing of wise judgments and decisions. But I'm sick of the way this factory was going before there were any unions,—the men were helpless. I'd rather see a union

here than let the workers be totally without any power on their side at all, at the mercy of every foreman, at the mercy of an employer, bless his dear old heart just the same, who thought he still had one hundred men outside in the shops. Those directors had better let me alone. We're supplying something right now, day by day, better than ever any union could supply, with the spirit of unions and employers what it is. The union will cease to function as a cause for concern in no time—if, if, if those directors could have patience! If they handle the union question the wrong end, there'll be another lovely mess. . . . Hello, Jo!"

"Could I see you alone, Mrs. Lamar? . . . I can hardly talk. I'm jus' sick over what I found out."

"Now what?"

"Mrs. Lamar, it ain't so—nobody can make me believe it's so. But what's makin' trouble—oh, that dirty skunk of a Pete—"

"Goodness, Jo, it can't be as bad as all that."

"Well, he made up his mind to get even with you and he done it. He sure done it. He's askin', and now all his old leftenants they're askin'—all the soreheads that don't like the idea of you messin' in at all, that want to get what they get with a fight—they're all goin' around askin' the men why they're lettin' a woman with—with morals like yours tie 'em round her little finger."

"Morals like mine?"

"Yes. I don't believe a word of it, but it's all over the factory. And the dirty trick of it—it's more'n I think a man could do—the dirty skunk, I say—"

"Here, Jo, get to the point."

"Well, he's sent the whole dirty lie on to the Board of Directors, signed by a lot of the soreheads. If I jus' could a known about it in time! Wrote it out in black and white!"

"Wrote *what* out?"

"That—I don't believe it, I can tell you. That you ain't moral. That—that trip to Atlantic City—well, you and Mr. Hutchins. . . . The Chamber of Commerce was just an excuse . . . that you—you were livin' with Mr. Hutchins. . . . He—he kept you goin'. You really done no work around this office. And the reason he left, his wife jus' took him off to Europe to get him away from you. I don't know jus' how he worded it all. Pete—I'll kill him yet!—he goes round—o' course it's him—he goes round askin' the men how they like bein' bossed by a 'kept woman.' "

"Jo, it's not really so. He's not really spreading a report like that."

"It's Gawd's truth."

"But no one's paying any attention."

"Now, Mrs. Lamar, it's hurtin' me to say it, but you can find folks in this world that'll pay attention to any one and anything. You see, out of two thousand workers there's whole lots got started long ago bein' suspicious of everything comin' from the office. The men that wanted a strike long ago—they got sore on you 'cause you kept peace somehow all the time and they was itchin' for a fight. Some soreheads take a long time gettin' over it—it's too soon to expect they'd all be feelin' good about the new plans here in the factory. They think maybe the union's

goin' to suffer. They don't like you havin' so much influence with the workers—the way they come to you with their troubles and all. Pete never got over wantin' to get even for bein' fired that first time—it made him sore on both you and the boss, or he tried to make himself think it did. He was all right for a while after the strike, and then when we fired him ourselves he said you was behind it all. . . . He kept at it till he could think of a way to get both you and Mr. Hutchins. The dirty skunk!”

“What about the Board of Directors and this story?”

“Why, Pete he got a petition up that you be removed for ‘moral reasons.’ Actually wrote down about you and the old boss at Atlantic City. Said you was no fit influence to have around the men. If they had to have a woman bossin' 'em around they wanted one they could respect. What do y' know about it! I'm done. I'm done with this dirty old factory. I'd never believe such rot as all that possible. I'm sick of everything. Michael got that Greek friend of Pete's down in the basement and he sure punched his face in for all time. I'm jus' itchin' to smash somebody's jaw. I feel like killin' somebody.”

“The men and women really *believe* a story like that?”

“Sure. You can get folks to believe anything. That is, if it's rotten. Makes me think folks *like* to believe rotten stories. They sit around and smack their lips over it.”

“Good gracious, Jo, what a state of affairs! What can we do about it?”

“Nothin'. That's jus' the hell of it. Some of us been talkin' about that. Some of 'em say you ought to call a meetin' and tell 'em it's a lie. I don't believe it ud do

any good. Just a lot more folks ud hear about it p'r'aps than knows it now—though a story like that sure goes fast.”

“I wonder . . . I wonder if those men, those gray-haired men on the Board of Directors, with the chances they’ve had to know the world and its ways . . . I wonder if they’ll be taken in with a story like that. I don’t believe they’ll so much as read the petition through. After all they’ve had to say about workers—the low-down incompetent lot they are—surely they’ll not find themselves putting faith in the word of the very men they so look down upon. And such characters as that Board—they’d be above paying attention to a lie like that! Besides, every one of them knows Andrew Hutchins and the kind of man he is. . . . A lie like that about Andrew Hutchins!”

“Here’s my hand, Mrs. Lamar. I won’t never believe but what you’re—you’re just-exactly-right!”

“And if I weren’t, Jo,—if I didn’t come up to your and Pete’s ideas of ‘just-exactly-right’—would it really be Pete’s and your and everybody else’s business? Would you really think it something the men ought to be told, something the Directors ought to know?”

“Good Gawd, Mrs. Lamar, you ain’t goin’ to say it’s all true then—about Atlantic City?”

“So . . . I suppose all the world does think other people’s affairs its business. . . . No, Jo. Pete’s report is all a lie. . . . I just wondered what difference it really would make had it been true.”

. . . Andrew Hutchins—to tell a story like that about Andrew Hutchins! Thank Heaven he was the other side

of the ocean and could never know. It would have blown over by the time he got back. . . .

"Come in. . . . You, Michael!"

"Yes, M's. Lamar, I been talkin' to Jo. He ain't told you one thing 'cause I jus' found it out. I thought maybe you ought to know. Pete and that gang—they sent a copy of that lie to Europe—to Mrs. Hutchins, it was addressed. That cousin of Pete's—he got braggin' too loud to a couple o' pals. Said they wanted to be dead honest an' thought it would only be square an' all like that to let Mrs. Hutchins know. 'Mr. Hutchins ought to have a chance to defend himself,' that cousin of Pete's said. An' he said after, 'It'll help 'em enjoy Europe more.' I'll kill 'em yet, M's. Lamar, don't you have no fear."

"How long ago was that report mailed to Europe?"

"Oh, a week or so ago, little after the report to the Directors. Idea didn't hit Pete till later. . . . Anythin' I can do for you, M's. Lamar, I'm yours!"

"Thank you, Michael. . . . Good-by."

So, anything else?

"Come in. . . . Emanuel, how are you?"

"How do-do, Mrs. Lamar. I—I just came—I know, Mrs. Lamar, you and me we've had lots of differences of opinion and all like that. I know what-all the men are saying. I told Scotty about it all. Scotty says I was to come and tell you it don't make a damn bit of difference to him and me what you do. Scotty and me—we got no use for them Bourgeois morals anyhow. Lot of crooks. Pete's as bad as any of them. Make a hell of a lot of noise

over what other folks do—that's the way with them Bourgeois—and then they go and do a lot worse themselves. That's Bourgeois for you all right. Scotty and me we don't get a lot of your ideas, but it's sure nothin' to us what you do, Mrs. Lamar. We're your friends, me and Scotty. I'd like to shake on that, Mrs. Lamar!"

"Thank you, Emanuel. I'm—I'm ever and ever so much obliged!"

"Don't make a damn bit of difference to me and Scotty. Do anything you like, Mrs. Lamar! S'long!"

So, anything else?

Yes, a few things more.

CHAPTER XVIII

I

"MOTHER, where's Uncle Phil Cairns? Why doesn't he come around any more?"

"His own little girl is here now. He has to stay home with her."

"Why doesn't he bring his girl here, or why don't you take us there? He got us all used to him and then he just doesn't appear. It's sort of lonesome without him, don't you think? What makes your face look like that, mother?"

". . . I say, mother—"

"Yes, Alec."

"A boy at school to-day said his father told him to ask me about you at Atlantic City. What's it all about—you at Atlantic City?"

So. . . . That far.

2

She met Philip Cairns at the entrance to the factory the next morning.

"Mister Peter, you have the strangest expression on your face!"

"I guess faces often look the way insides feel."

"What can the matter be?"

He looked into her office and saw no one was there.

"May I come in a moment?"

"Peter, Peter, you look like the end of the world. You seem actually embarrassed. Whatever can it be?"

". . . Jenny—"

"Out with it."

"Mrs. Cairns is very sick. . . . I won't be at the office this afternoon. . . . She has to go to the hospital, very suddenly. The trip, and getting settled, was too much after all. . . . She has to be operated on—capital operation. . . . Oh, good morning, Miss Browne. . . . No, no, I was just leaving."

3

"Jenny Lamar, when Mr. Cairns stays away from the office two days and a half it surely is a different place. The poor man, what a state he must be in!"

"Have you any late news, Anabelle?"

"I phoned again just now to the hospital. They still don't expect her to live. Think of the hours and hours he has suffered, never knowing from one to the next if she could pull through! The agony of it! . . . A funny little messenger boy just brought this note. He didn't wait for an answer."

It was scrawled hastily from the hospital. "Jenny, could you possibly be home at two o'clock to-day for half an hour? I need you terribly. P. C."

Why, why, hadn't he said nine-thirty this morning? To

live until two and know that he needed her for something all that time. For what, for what?

“... You said you were going to think things over last night, Jenny. What did you decide?”

“My brain doesn’t think very well these days. . . . So much depends on how long it takes to live down a story like Pete’s. If the machinery of our new labor policies had been running long, everything in working order, it wouldn’t make such a great deal of difference what the men and women thought about me. And yet it would too. The personal element in work like this counts tremendously. As it is, each day feeling our way, each day a hundred new and untried points to settle—it’s an overpowering handicap to try to accomplish things against suspicion. Not a woman has been in this office on any problem for three days, and you know the way they used to come. Evidently the Board of Directors is paying no attention. But if they didn’t pay attention, if they let me work on after the seven months are up, as labor manager, I wonder if I could swing the job. It’s what you might call touchy work at best just now, all the doubters with their eyes glued to see what mistakes we can make. The workers aren’t a bit used to their new responsibilities after this short time. It makes a big difference who is at the head and what they think of her, or him.”

“... Here is the morning mail from Mr. Cairns’ office.”

Jenny picked out one letter to read at once.

“... So, that goose is cooked. We have the busiest Board of Directors of any industry in the land. They don’t seem to have another thing to do but keep track

of Mr. Cairns and me. It gives one such a happy feeling about the work—such kind interest. The factory was in a bad way, it's true. They could well quake for the funds. They cannot get over the idea that the new labor policy is going to wreck everything—so they screw a microscope on the people they delegate to manage matters and block us at every step. What do they know 'way off there in New York about this factory?"

"What's the latest?"

"After due and deliberate consideration the Board concludes that the manager and assistant manager have overstepped the bounds of sound business precedent and wisdom in working in any way through the unions. The welfare of the country as a whole must be considered. They as one link in the great chain of industry which upholds the business integrity of our nation must do their share in standing by the traditional American principles of freedom and the sacred rights of the individual. At the expiration of the seven months, therefore, ladies and gentlemen, questions concerning labor must be carried on through individuals only. All recognition of unions in any way must be withdrawn. . . .

"Still I have hope, Anabelle Browne! Maybe the seeds we have sown these seven months will bear fruit. If they let us keep on with what we've started, it may be that we can avoid another mess of the kind we had—that lovely strike of five beautiful weeks. We'll show them yet! Maybe seven months will have given enough men the assurance that there is sufficient machinery on their side to see that they get a square deal."

Four hours more until two o'clock.

. . . Yet that story, that story of Pete's. . . Would some one else after all have to come in and take her place? It was like snatching a child away and giving it to a foster mother.

Would it mean—leaving the factory altogether? When then could she ever see Mr. Peter at all?

Three hours yet until two o'clock.

. . . His wife was dying. No! Two and a half days now she had locked her brain tight on the whole picture. Lock it again! She had tried not even to think of Mr. Peter. She had succeeded in suspending him in a setting of fantasy such times as she had backslid and let the thought of him enter her mind at all. Off on a desert island he was and she was, she, Jenny Lamar. Neither of them had any past, present, or future. They possessed not the faintest connection with anything in the whole wide real world.

"They've started work on the lunch room, Jenny. You ought to go up and see how things are going."

"I suppose I had better."

She arrived home at half past one, her soul in agony. What *could* he want of her. Anything, anything, so long as she really could help.

There was a letter from Paris—Mr. Hutchins! . . . Oh, oh, what was her world made of—the world she had always so loved? . . . Was she reading real words, or could it all be a crazy dream? . . . Could she rush to Paris and be of help to the poor broken man? The futility of that

thought! It was the last thing in the world she could now do. That Mrs. Hutchins—*Mrs. Hutchins*—could believe such a tale! Pete, you did indeed get even. . . .

Frail, tired little Mrs. Hutchins, sick from the excitement of traveling around strange lands ten, twenty years too late, Mrs. Hutchins ill in bed, had opened the letter containing Pete's handiwork. Before he so much as waited to see what it was all about, Mr. Hutchins had rushed for the doctor. By the time he got back there were some papers torn in bits all over the bed, and Mrs. Hutchins sobbing: "Andy, Andy—oh, the faith I had in you all these years! That you—*you*, could have done a thing like that! Let me die—oh, let me die!" And Jenny Lamar, —the way she had taken Jenny Lamar into her own home almost, had loved her like a daughter. And all the time—all the time— "Oh, *Andy!*"

And then she said no more—just lay there still, except for quiet sobbing, hour in, hour out. The doctor said her condition was serious on account of her heart. "Mrs. Lamar, Mrs. Lamar, what *can* it all be about? Cable at once, I am desperate. When I ask her questions, she just shakes her head and says: 'You know all too well, Andrew Hutchins! That you—*you*—should do a thing like that! And Jenny Lamar!' Cable me, Mrs. Lamar, if you have the least idea what it is all about. I am so helpless. I started to cable you to come yourself. When I told Mrs. Hutchins that I was going to send for you to see what could be done, the quiet little soul—Mrs. Lamar, she *screamed*. How it frightened me! She cried, 'She'll not step foot in Paris!' Cable me at once. I am

desperate. She gets worse every hour. My poor, tired little wife. . . .”

It was Mr. Peter's step on the front porch. The suffering look of him! “What is it?”

“Jenny, give me strength! I've come to you just for that. Hold both my hands this way and say: ‘Peter, go ahead! It's the only thing for you to do!’”

“Tell me, just tell me what it's all about.”

“Two more doctors came last night late in consultation. At ten o'clock they said it was only a question of a few hours. At eleven they said she was holding her own, but there was no hope for recovery. At one this morning they came to me. ‘There is just one thing that can save her. She cannot live twenty-four hours unless there is a transfusion. Would you be willing to have that gone through with?’ They tested my blood. She got a little worse toward morning. It looked as if after all nothing could be done. Now it has been decided the transfusion will take place as soon as I get back. I told them—after these three days now—I simply had to have half an hour before the operation. At first they said I shouldn't leave. But I had to! I was like a wild animal. They couldn't keep me from seeing you! For I need your help, Jenny, need it as I've never needed anything in this world. You—you understand everything—everything. Tell me I must go ahead with it. They think, if she pulls through this transfusion—they think—she may live—years. But always, they say, an invalid. . . . I must do it, Jenny, mustn't I? It's the only thing I can do, isn't it? Say, ‘Go ahead, Peter!’ Say, ‘It's the only thing you can do!’ And—and

kiss me, Jenny, so I can be thinking of it as I lie there. . . . The heart of me is pulled to pieces. . . . Tell me it's the only thing!"

"It's the only thing."

"Jenny, say it harder! Look at me! Don't say it the way I say it. Hold my hands tight. Make me sure!"

"It's the only thing!"

"Jenny—Jenny— Good-by. . . ."

4

"Anabelle, did you go yourself to the hospital? Did—did you see Mr. Cairns?"

"I told them it was very urgent business, that I wanted to see him for only a second. Indeed, all I had to do of course was to give him your note. But you said I must see him personally if possible. . . . Just as they opened the door to his room, I looked in. He was in bed, with his face buried in a pillow. The doctor was patting him on the back gently and I heard him say: 'There, there, Cairns. I know it really is almost too wonderful to be true. Hard for you to believe—the relief and all. Marvelous operation—you did your part well, splendidly. The danger is past for her—she'll recover now without a doubt. Wonderful! Wonderful!'

"Think, Jenny Lamar, of how Mr. Cairns must have felt! Isn't it almost too good to be true?"

"And then the doctor started toward the door. I stepped back into the hall, to ask him about the case in more detail. He was a charming man. Said all five doctors

were quite unprepared for the complete success of the transfusion. It's long enough now so that they can be sure of the results. The doctor said of course she would always be an invalid—more so than previously. Indeed he claimed that she probably would never be able to leave her room. But the wonderful part of it is she's *alive!*

“And in the excitement of that good news, I forgot all about leaving your note.

“. . . Here's the mail again. . . . Looks like important letters. Shall I open them for you? . . . What's the matter, Jenny—why don't you talk? . . . I say, here's one from the Board of Directors, to you. Don't you want to read it? Jenny! Wake up! . . . Well, then, I'll lay it on your desk. It would appear worth your reading as soon as possible. . . . Shall I go ahead with getting out the notices of the meeting? Whom did the Board of Management choose to make the speech about the Board of Directors' new union policy? It's wicked that you can't be the one to do it. . . . I wish you'd read that letter on your desk before you go on with any plans at all. . . . Jenny Lamar! Are you alive?

“. . . And are you still sitting there like that? Have you been sitting there all this time? . . . What about the Board of Directors' letter? Jenny Lamar, you embarrass me the way you act. There are important things to do! I don't know whether you are sick or what is the matter. I never saw you act like this before. . . . Shall I read your mail out loud to you? . . . Pretty soon I'll get scared,

if you just continue this way. At least read that Board of Directors' letter!"

Jenny bent her head slightly. She would read the page spread out on her desk. It really made no difference what the board had to say. Nothing made any difference. . . . Queer how you could make yourself think you never had been thinking about a certain outcome to a certain situation—and yet if a certain outcome had never entered your head, how could it seem such an utter frustration when the situation turned out otherwise? The door to her garden. . . . How difficult to be honest, even to one's self, about death. How almost impossible to be honest! Yet why not, why not? Why should she not say to herself, "I, Jenny Lamar, wish, wish, wish—she—had—*died!*" There—it had been said. . . . The door to her garden. . . . The gate to his—cage. It was one and the same. He would feel those bars closer than—no, not closer than before he ever had known Jenny. He had said they never could be as close as that again. She had broadened out his cage—it could never be the old confines. But closer than since he had known her. His reaction would be as hers. Each of them had been standing at that opening the last days. They—yes, yes, be honest, be honest . . . they had held their breath, thinking, thinking, thinking to see that gate open. . . . Hand in hand—they would enter the glory of a garden without boundaries. Hand in hand, that garden without boundaries would be the whole wide world—every place, everything, would be sunshine, fragrance, song—hand in hand. Once, in a moment of blessed forgetfulness, he had said to her: "It is our world, isn't it, Jenny? Don't

you just feel, now that we have each other, that we own all creation, you and I?" Yes, through that gate which could have opened any time these last days, they would have stepped into their ownership of all creation. The wonder of it!

And as they stood there, that gate which had seemed to open ever so little, closed tight. Tight. The agony of it was that it seemed to shut him in on his side, and shut Jenny out on the other. Indeed, a gate closing with both of them on the same side—that would be no gate to reckon with at all. Or hardly at all. Such a gate had proscribed the limitations of their overflowing months together, but because they were together almost constantly, they scarcely knew the gate was there. Compared to his being out of her world entirely, and she out of his, as it had been after Atlantic City. . . . Yes, just being together, lovers. The gate had kept them from roaming to the farthest limits—there was a gate, yes, and it was closed. But there was still such a marvelously great space for them to explore, together!

The last few weeks—had he not been on his side of those bars, she on hers, ever since—his—Mrs. Cairns—came to town? He had, she had. But she never had faced it quite squarely. It was because of seeing the gate open the last few days—the closing again was what made it all so vivid now. His cage—he would feel so cramped again. Her garden—the grayness of it.

". . . Jenny, what about it, I ask you again?"

"What about what?"

"The *letter*, of course!"

"What letter?"

"Well, I do declare. Something surely is the matter with you. The letter from the Board of Directors!"

"Oh, yes, I'll read it."

"NEW YORK . . .

"Mrs. Jenny Lamar, Assistant Manager Hutchins and Company.

"DEAR MRS. LAMAR:—In the light of the developments of the last seven months, and particularly of the last few weeks, the Board of Directors has concluded that the welfare of Hutchins and Company necessitates taking action in certain matters.

"As you know, the seven months granted as sufficient time in which to test the value of certain labor theories have practically expired. The Board of Directors feels that the promised increase in production has in no way evidenced itself. After careful examination of an agent on the spot, we conclude, almost unanimously, to discontinue further experimentation in the matter of such labor representation and control as you had in mind.

"The Board of Directors has also notified Mr. Cairns that in the future the policy of Hutchins and Company must divorce itself entirely from union influence.

"We should like to feel justified in continuing your services in some capacity with Hutchins and Company. After due consideration, it has appeared to the Board, in the light of recent developments, that it may be the part of better wisdom to do away with the office of Assistant Manager as conceived by Mr. Hutchins. It is sincerely hoped that you will find no difficulty in obtaining employment in some other congenial business.

"The Board of Directors wishes to express its appreciation of your services in the past, in token of which it has voted you three months' salary.

"Very truly yours,

"H. C. WILLIAMS, *Secretary.*"

The secretary had wanted to add, but could not see just where to fit it in, that the Board really felt the place for a woman with children to care for was certainly not in a factory. The whole thing showed that women were not fitted for business life. The Lord meant women to stay home. By paying her three months' salary, a member of the Board remarked, she could stay home at least three months.

"She should get married, that's what she should do!" It was the conclusion of the kind-hearted Vice Chairman.

But Jenny naturally knew nothing of any of that, because, as mentioned, the secretary could not quite see where to get it in.

". . . Well?"

There was that Anabelle Browne at her again.

"Jenny, say something!"

"Why don't you ask me to sing?"

"Do you realize what it means?"

"Don't insult my intelligence."

"We are minus jobs on the first of the month."

"Don't you worry for a moment,—Mr. Cairns will be only too glad to keep you indefinitely, that I know."

"Yes, but you, Jenny, what in the world about you?"

"Oh, that— I don't have to decide about that this minute."

What she was thinking of was not what would become of her, but Phil Cairns. He would come back from the hospital to find an order to break the unions, the whole machinery of labor participation in management thrown overboard, and no more Jenny Lamar at his right hand, to

work with. He had grown to have every ounce as much faith in her labor plans as she had herself.

And the workers—nothing left to them, unless, indeed, they could succeed in winning out on the union issue, which was highly improbable now. Back they would be once more to where they were five years ago—an unorganized, helpless body of discontented, or indifferent, men and women, each exerting the minimum of energy possible, having no more interest in their jobs than just to hold them until something better turned up. The production curve would continue down, the wage curve would stay stationary, or in turn go down, profits would shrink, until . . . until. Well, some other factory would be the gainer. Harry Hutchins, and his dream of furnishing the whole eager country with his wares. . . . He would never know. Andy Hutchins, Andy, who carried on the dream. . . . Things might limp along until he too could be spared the final outcome. One detail only of that beautiful dream had fallen short,—they had failed to take sufficiently into account the flesh and blood of the business. Men, women,—Jenny loved them, loved them! They were going back into that hopeless treadmill, that day-to-day grind, where never a ray of their own worth to the larger scheme of things would ever enter. They *were* often discouraging, they *were* often stupid, they *were* often exasperating, they *were* often apathetic, but they were men, women! She put her head on her desk and cried, cried for the people she had to leave. What if Pete had spread lies about her? If she could know everything about Pete she would understand why he could do a thing like that. Perhaps he

really thought it would serve The Cause. She didn't care now. She held nothing against Pete, he was one of the men. She loved Pete, she loved every single one of them. She too had her Dream, her Dream of helping the workers remake a bit of their world. She would have seen to it that it paid those gray-haired Directors in New York. She held a trust for them—was she so stupid as to forget that? But the Dream—the Dream concerned itself with the human beings on whose shoulders—on whose careless, indifferent, impatient, suspicious shoulders, if you will—rested in part the burden for the success of that very same “great chain of industry which upholds the business integrity of our nation.” Yes, yes, her factory was indeed a link in that chain. Her men and women were what held that link together. She would cement them to the factory with bonds of interest and loyalty. Interest and loyalty would hold them, but how it would hold! In the end they would—oh, surely they would—have caught her idea! Together they would labor on that structure which would make each man and woman of them feel the welfare of the Great American Industrial Dream was bound up in how each one of them made good. It would be theirs to prove that not by bitter factional fighting, not by paternalism, not by indifference, would that Dream materialize. Gone the old boast of either side in the industrial game of “We alone can and will—” “We together! Our Welfare! Together we shall make of Hutchins and Company the strongest link of all that chain! Together we shall prove that either side alone is powerless to help create that American Dream! Management and men *together!*” . . . Mistakes—oh, yes,

they would make mistakes. Always the faith would be there. Sooner or later two thousand workers would have to feel it. Perhaps one thousand five hundred would never catch more than a spark. But the wonders a spark, if it is the spark of a Dream, can perform!

Her men and women—people she loved. And they had tied her hands. Pete—never mind. Pete was one of them, or had been one of them. The Board of Directors. . . . They were part of it all too. No, she could hold nothing against them. They thought they were acting for the good of their Cause as they saw it. Who, who would rise up and explain so that the Petes of the country and the Boards of Directors of the country would understand, that the Cause of each was ultimately really one Cause? Separated the way they were . . . how could the Dream ever come true? This great land which was producing things to revolutionize a world—was it to remain divided against itself? In the end little men of shrunken souls would gaze upon a mockery of industrial wreckage. They could produce no more—the Dream had collapsed about all their heads—because the price had been too great. The souls of men, those shrunken souls of men—that had been the cost. The gods in their anger would have none of what the shrinking of souls had paid for. Hundreds of thousands of years of men and women—to the end that half pursue their gains at the expense of the other half. She could have shown—she, Jenny Lamar—that there was another way! Bitterness, indifference, incompetence, arrogance—there was a touchstone to turn it all to the success of the Dream. She had it burning in her heart. Because she loved them

—loved that Board of Directors, loved Pete, loved them all, all, all, she could have shown them in the end! . . . Faith, it took faith. How little there was of it in the world. Where could one turn to reinforce what there was? Where turn to create more?

“. . . I'm no use around the office this afternoon, Anabelle Browne,—I'm going home.”

As she got off the car, the plump blonde wife of the steel man, she who had given her the little pink bedroom slippers with the funny heels, passed her at the corner.

“Hello!” called Jenny.

The wife of the steel man glanced at Jenny as if she had never seen her before.

So—that far.

If there at home wasn't a letter from old Aunt Emie. . . . What in the world did she have to say?

So—that far. Really, a person could almost smile. . . . She was broken-hearted, was Aunt Emie, at the dreadful gossip she had heard. She hoped, of course, there was no truth in it. Still, Jenny, dear, perhaps after all it was in the family. . . . Her poor dear mother. . . . And really, she never could have a great deal of respect for her Uncle Alec. . . . However, one should think kindly of the dead.

5

“Jenny, I can't keep on with it! I hate the very thought of it! The job was one glorious Adventure with you there,

even when I could see you only during work hours. The help you were! I had no idea how I'd come to rely on you. Now—it's like going into a tomb. I hate it! And to know the men who hired me fired you! How can I work with any spirit for them?"

"Hold on, Peter, for a little longer. Somehow I feel we owe it to Andrew Hutchins. He could walk off and leave the factory in a mess—he was old. You can't go until things are settled again. Almost all the men are back who ever will come back. Two departments have to be closed down altogether, you say,—necessary economy. . . . Let Mr. Hutchins get a bit over his terrible shock—he cabled he is bringing his wife's body back here. I sent word I'd meet him in New York and help all I could. He seemed so anxious for me to be there. . . . It would be agony heaped on agony if he comes back and finds you contemplating leaving and everything on end."

"But you will stay here these ten days, until you must be in New York, and let me have you to count on that long? . . . After all, whatever I work at has to be in this town. The doctors say never another move. After all, what difference does it make any more what job I hold, as long as it has to mean working without you?"

"Peter, haven't you come at last to feel that it is better for me to go away? You see—we've proved to ourselves that we're not strong enough. I can't be in the same city with you and not see you, see you—all the time. You, you—it is the same with you. . . . Now that I can no longer work beside you—no, the hunger with both of us is too great. It's a fight, fight most of twenty-four hours—

Strange how oft the lips must call the end
Before the heart first hears.

Or hearing, heeds.

"It will be struggle enough for us both to carry on. Why put obstacles in the way? . . . Besides, the combination of that story, and my labor ideas—it's not so easy to find a job around this town. I tried for a week, before I could find the courage to face going away. I haven't spirit enough right now to confront the continual reminder that I am an outcast. It's no fun."

"I ought to be convinced, I know, Jenny. I suppose it is the only thing to do. Yet where does a person look for the strength to carry the decision through? If it were for a week—even a month. . . . Jenny, Jenny, it can't be forever! I refuse to face that. Say what you will, go where you will, somehow I must and will see you now and then. I will! What harm could it do, what harm? What can a man accomplish when he looks forward to an eternity of darkness? Twice a year—if I could see you just twice a year! Then there would be—your garden to look forward to through all the waiting months; your garden to look back upon through the lonely months that follow. Jenny, Jenny, I could fight through anything, if twice a year I knew there would be—your garden!"

"Can there be a single god in heaven who would begrudge to mortals sunshine twice in all the year? Peter, surely there is not a god in heaven who loves misery for its own sake. . . ."

PART V



CHAPTER XIX

I

EARLY summer ten years later.

Where had those years and years flown since she and Billy sat under this very tree by this very cove at Hastings? One moment it seemed to Jenny as if it must have been but a month ago; the next, a passing of centuries. Here it was she and Billy had become engaged, here for the first time he had kissed her. A world of happiness, a world which knew neither doubt nor discouragement. It was well so. Why should not every one have a taste of that sort of world? . . . Billy, her Billy—so young. Her heart had known only the youth of him. She had journeyed down the years—goodness, soon they would be calling her “middle-aged.” But Billy—Billy was forever young. That boy had loved her so, and she him. Yet she had grown old—gray hairs were hers, many of them. Back there, back in those Hastings days, in those married days—a child she had been, just a child. What in the world could she have understood of life? What really had Billy understood of life? Two children they were. Yet how wise they had felt themselves! If she could only feel half that wise now, she with her gray hairs.

Steve came striding along, her big splendid Steve.

“Waiting for you!”

"And did you succeed, as you proposed, in reviewing your youth?"

"Steve, sometimes I wonder if you and Alec think I had any youth at all. Do you picture me as always gray-haired and working all day? Really I was young once—as young as you yourself!"

"Mother, I never think of you as anything but young, really! Always you have seemed just a bit older than I—just enough older so that I could go to you with my troubles. When I was ten, I used to think of you as about sixteen. When I was sixteen, you seemed about twenty-four. And now, now I'd say you're about thirty-five."

"Bless your heart for that. . . . And my having to work, Steve. So often I've wondered what it would all have been like if I hadn't had to work, to be away from home a good part of the time. How much, I wonder, did we all lose of each other?"

"Alec and I have talked that over. There were times, of course, when we used to wonder why our mother couldn't be home like other boys'. There were times when we wanted you for something and you weren't there. In the long run it may have been a gain. I wish you could have heard Alec in class one day. The subject came up of working mothers,—what a handicap it was when they had to be away from home all day, what it did to the children, how mothers ought to stay home where they belonged. Alec got sore—you ought to have heard him! He asked if they thought a woman worked for the fun of it. He said he and I were the sons of a working woman,

and one point sure, it certainly made a boy realize the kind of mother he had when he saw how she pegged away at things day after day. He thought your having to work had done us good. Right from the start almost we realized you were working for us. I tell you, we had mighty few notions of wasting either time or money. We always knew we'd get to work and do our share just as soon as ever we could. In high school, and especially here in college, time and again the temptation came along to loaf on the job. Then Alec and I would remind ourselves of how never had we seen you loafing once, and we'd dig our toes in. We were always so darn proud of you, proud of the way you kept at trying to put over your ideas, proud of the friends you had, especially the kind of men so often at our house, and the way they valued your judgment. But not until college did we realize perhaps the biggest asset of all—the fact that you had brought so much of the world each night home to us. I suppose if we'd had a father, you and he might have discussed things, and we would have heard. But it wouldn't have been the same as the way you talked right *to* us about everything. I do believe Alec and I understood more about what the big outside world meant before we ever entered college than most boys realize when they graduate. It stood us in good stead course after course we took at Hastings. . . . Imagine, mother, just imagine, Alec and me not making good when we've seen how you've worked all the years!"

"But, Steve, I can't let you put me on a pedestal for one minute. The last few years I didn't need to work so hard. I've known that any time you could have taken

over the entire financial responsibility between you. You boys have been helping yourselves more and more. I've money put by. I could really stop working any time. You'll be entirely self-supporting, beginning with graduation this week. Alec needs very little any more. There's that nest egg of Cynthia Rawlins'. . . . I work now, partly from habit; partly, mostly, because—because I need it to keep going spiritually. Once I did work with my whole heart in it,—that's joy for you! Since then . . . work can come to be just a means of keeping your heart together. . . . If a time ever comes in life when the universe no longer seems made to order, there's nothing in the world to help one over the years like work. No, Steve, from the very start I've been no martyr working. It is the thing that has saved my life."

"Do you mean, mother, that you really preferred to work than not to work?"

"I mean just that. I *had* to work; I *have* to work. If you laid a million dollars in my lap, I would still have to work."

"But why?"

"Because—it's too long a story. Some day I may tell you it all. Because—a year is made up of twelve months, and each month of some thirty days and nights, and each day and night of twenty-four hours. A year is a long span of time to put behind one."

"Have—have you really ever been unhappy? Why, mother, I can't believe it! And are you still where you want to go on helping put the years behind you—with work?"

"Still. . . . So, you see, Steve, when the time comes that you want to get married, say, you're to go right ahead with your plans."

"It—it doesn't seem quite right."

"But it is quite right. I should be miserable if I thought you held up falling in love on my account!"

"I haven't done that. . . . The queer part of it is, there doesn't seem any way to hold up falling in love. You fall—and there you are. Though you may have sworn to yourself a thousand times that it was something you would never do—at least for years. I was almost ashamed to fall in love,—it didn't seem right to you. I've been ashamed to tell you that I have fallen in love. I mean, you know, really seriously in love."

"Steve! . . . Oh, but I'm happy—happy for you—for the girl. A bit jealous, just this minute. . . . A bit, and I'll get over that soon enough. . . . Makes me want to cry—just a little. I'll get over that soon enough, too. . . . I'll be all right in a second. . . . Bless you, Steve, bless you!"

"You couldn't guess who it is, mother!"

"No, I know I couldn't guess."

"Nancy Cairns."

"What, Steve? What did you say?"

"It's Nancy Cairns!"

"Steve—you're going to marry—Nancy Cairns? Oh, Steve,—I—it—"

"Mother, mother—you—you don't object to Nancy Cairns! It can't be that?"

"No, no! Oh, I'm so—so glad it's Nancy Cairns! It's

just—I'm so surprised, so—so—surprised. My son, my Steve—Nancy, his Nancy. Why, Steve, it's almost unbelievable!"

"No, it's true."

"Does—her father know?"

"Not yet. I wanted to tell you first. My, mother, maybe you don't think I'm glad to have him for a father-in-law! He won't say no, will he?"

"No, he won't say no."

"You never knew her mother, did you? She's an invalid, you know—hasn't left her room for years. It was a fearfully hard fight for Nancy to get away to college at all, and then she could only stay one year. Nancy knows it will be terrible enough for her mother ever to think of her getting married. She feels as it is that when we ever do get married, we shall have to live with her folks, in order to have her mother accept the idea. I'd hate that—so would Nancy. It's the one cloud on our wonderful blue sky. Nancy has given so much to her mother, so much. You know, mother, once a terrible thought came over me—I suppose it means I'm simply rotten at heart. It scares me just to realize I could think such a thing. . . . But once I caught myself thinking, 'I wish her mother would *die!*' But, mother, I do! Tell me, is that such a fearfully wicked thing to wish? Does it show I'm bad all through . . . ?"

2

If any one had ever asked Jenny Lamar what she considered would be the greatest ordeal of her life, she would

have answered at once, to herself, to meet Mrs. Philip Cairns. Goodness knows what answer she would have given out loud,—something, of course, entirely different. . . . Certainly she would not miss Steve's wedding. Certainly she could not attend Steve's wedding and not meet Nancy's mother. . . . All these years she had never so much as seen a picture of Mrs. Cairns—she did not know the color of her hair. Practically never had she spoken of her. There had come a time, after the boys left home for college, and life seemed to have settled down to a somewhat lonesome fight to keep at anything at all, when she caught herself feeling bitter towards Mrs. Cairns. Up to then it was only in a clandestine and furtive manner, and at rare intervals, she fell to letting herself skim over the thought that Mrs. Cairns seemed to be living forever. During the last three or four years she asked herself quite audaciously, "Is she *never* going to die?" In dreams at night sometimes Mrs. Cairns would assume the shape of a great blackness which stood between Jenny and all the joy and sunlight in the world.

And instead of a great blackness, she was a thin, pale form huddled in a chair by a window.

"Nancy's mother!" Jenny came forward as steadily as she could and put out her hand.

"Yes, I'm Nancy's mother." It was a voice as thin and pale as the body it came from. "And I'm Philip Cairns' wife."

Jenny dropped somewhat hastily into the nearest chair.

"I expect, Mrs. Lamar, you've been waiting rather long for me to die."

Jenny began to wonder if really this were not one of her terrible dreams. Perhaps it was the Day of Judgment, and a fiery God was putting her soul on trial. She would gladly call "Guilty!" at once, if only she would awake.

"You and Phil have been pretty faithful all these years, haven't you? Sometimes I used to say, 'I'll live longer than their love will last!' Once or twice you got rather desperate, other men pressed you a bit hard, it looked as if I never would die, and you were tired of working, tired of waiting, lonely. But on the whole—on the whole, you two have certainly held to the notion that some day I'd— And yet here I am."

It was a dream. Where could this thin, pale woman with her dark eyes have gotten hold of all this truth?

"And on top of everything else, your son comes along and takes my daughter! I could have stood all the rest, but not that! Phil—he's just my husband. But Nancy—Nancy is my daughter, and it is your son, *your* son, who robs me of her! Did you plan that?"

"Oh, Mrs. Cairns—"

"Well, of course you'd not admit it. Now I have nothing left to live for . . . except—my husband."

She looked squarely at Jenny. By that time Jenny began to feel almost inhuman as she looked squarely at Mrs. Cairns.

"You, Mrs. Lamar—you think you've had a hard time keeping your head up these last ten years, waiting for me to die. How much fun do you think I've had living? Is there any time you'd have changed places with me—*exact*

places, you in my body, I in yours? I guess not! You, very sorry for yourself that I kept on living—what did you expect me to do—take poison? No, you waited until you could inflict something slower and surer and more painful. You had your son take Nancy. . . . Had I met you a year ago—then I'd have said nothing—perhaps you'd never have guessed how much I knew. But now. . . . At first I refused to see you. As the woman my husband loved—bah, what is a husband?—you amused me more than anything else. But as the mother of the man who takes my daughter—no, I never wanted to lay eyes on you. . . . I wasn't strong enough to have my way."

"I—I can go. Really, Mrs. Cairns, I can go now."

"Oh, no, now you're here, it's relieving me to see you. It would be too bad not to let any one know how much I knew. I've only had the nurse to talk to about it. To have said anything to Phil would have spoilt it all. He would have become suspicious, and would have been too careful of what he carried around in his coat pockets. Really, you know, you and Phil have been Miss Humphreys' and my main interest in life—next, of course, to Nancy. We never missed a thing, she and I. We knew when Phil got too low in spirits to so much as write you a letter. Then, when you didn't hear from him, how desperate you got! Remember how you used to write, 'All I have of you, most of fifty-two weeks in the year, are letters. When you deny me those, it seems as if I couldn't go on! It isn't fair, Peter, not to write!'

"Don't blush. I tell you Miss Humphreys and I would

have perished from boredom often, without you and Phil. . . . We always could tell when it neared the time for his visit with you twice a year. About a month beforehand he would start singing as he dressed in the morning, such whistlings in his bath. Miss Humphreys and I would smile at each other. 'About time for the gentleman to say he'll have to be out of town for about ten days!'

"The questions we used to ask him. 'What are you going to do this trip, Phil?' He'd have something or other to say. I suppose he really did get a bit of business done—enough to excuse his absence at the office. The last few days before the time to leave—oh, it was funny! He could scarcely eat. We'd hear him up about six o'clock in the morning. He was like a boy before Christmas. For about a month after he got back his spirits were fairly high. Then he'd begin going down, down, until after a few months he'd go around like a tomb. 'Why so joyous, Phil?' I'd ask him. Your letters followed his spirits—cheerful things a month before and a month after, and then you'd start going down, down.

"When Phil got back from one of those trips we'd say, 'Tell us all you did!' That was Miss Humphreys' and my best joke, that 'all.' He had countless ways of changing the subject, but she and I were almost too smart for him. 'Didn't you have any pleasure at all?' Oh, yes, of course some. But we'd have to wait for your letters to know what pleasures. 'Peter, wasn't that night on the beach wonderful?—to have been on a beach again with you!' Somebody wanted to take you to a certain restaurant—of course you could never go there with any one but

Peter. You were always throwing a kiss to this place and that with your peculiar 'Thank You, God.' . . . Oh, you see how very much I know!

"I know too how tedious it was for Miss Humphreys and me those times you failed to write for more than a month on end. Sometimes we'd suspect that he put the letters away in the office as soon as they came. Except that he always got in such a state, we were pretty sure he was not hearing. At last a letter would arrive. Miss Humphreys could hear him rereading and rereading it in bed—the sound of the paper. You did almost give up several times, didn't you? I suppose Phil would have had to find some one else. I always suspected there must have been several others before you came along. I've never had any faith in men. Fickle things. . . . Goodness knows how long your Steve will stay faithful to Nancy. If he so much as looks at another woman—I should kill him! I do believe I should find some way to kill him! That's one reason why they shall live here in this house. Between Miss Humphreys and me, we'll be able to tell the first symptoms. Wait until your son begins to love another woman!"

"Really, Mrs. Cairns, I can't stand this any longer. If you'll excuse me—I shall have to go."

"I'm very tired anyhow. I've told you almost everything I know, you mother of the boy who takes my Nancy. . . . There were large parts of your letters which were exceedingly boresome. You seemed to think Phil would be terribly interested in your trials and tribulations in getting a lot of uneducated people to help take care of themselves,

when other people surely could do it a great deal better for them. We skipped as much of all that as we could. We had enough troubles of our own. . . . We never could see why you didn't find something interesting to do. And writing all that to Phil. . . . Goodness knows he could look worried enough about his own affairs. Perhaps he poured all his anxieties into your ears. Men are that selfish. I kept my aches and pains to myself—I always expected him to keep his worries to himself. And he did. I'll say that much for him. . . . Good-by. If you had never been born, your son would never have been born. . . . Nancy, my Nancy. . . . The one joy, the one real happiness I've had in twenty-two years, the one person I love in all the world, the one thing which has made existence worth while—and your son takes her."

"Mrs. Cairns, don't—don't cry like that. He's not taking her away. They're to live right here by you—she'll be just as much a daughter to you. Perhaps you could find with time that Steve would be a real help to you—he's very fine, is Steve."

"Yes, yes, by the time I find he'd be any help—by that time he'll probably be in love with some other woman."

"Mrs. Cairns! I haven't a doubt in the world but that Steve will love Nancy as long as she lives!"

"If she should lose her health—lie flat on her back month in, month out; if the least noise is torture to her, even the sound of his voice; if the pain, and the fear, and the misery keep her from taking any interest in anything or anybody—you think, do you, Mrs. Lamar, that your

Steve will love her, and her only, as long as she lives? Oh, you do, do you, Mrs. Lamar?"

"We can certainly hope and pray that she never will lose her health!"

"So, you think hoping and praying help? . . . Good-by, Mrs. Lamar. . . . I shall be at the wedding—my mind is made up to that. I intend to hear the minister say, 'for better or for worse, in sickness and in health. . . .' And he shall say it in a church. I shall be standing next to Philip Cairns when the minister says that, and I shall be witness to hearing your son say, 'I do.' . . . In sickness and in health. . . . Thirty years is it since I heard those words. They never need to be repeated to have one remember. I'm thinking Philip Cairns never forgot them entirely—I can say that much for him. . . . If your Steve forgets them . . . ah, I must live till then! . . . And yet . . . I almost wish he would . . . I almost wish he would. I could get my Nancy back again! My darling. . . . My Nancy. . . ."

Jenny closed the door softly.

3

"My mother Lamar—I'm so glad it's your son I'm marrying to-night! I can't quite tell you what it has meant, having you for a friend. All the help you've been! Sometimes I seemed so terribly young and ignorant about everything, so lost in the world. Ever since that wonderful letter you wrote me when Steve told you—ever since then, I've felt I could turn to you for anything. I showed that

letter to mother, and somehow it got destroyed. I told mother I wanted to keep it always, as long as I lived. . . . Without you and father I don't suppose Steve and I could have managed to get married at all. Father—my, I never saw father so like a rock. 'Nancy *shall* marry Steve!' And Nancy marries Steve to-night. . . . You see it isn't that my own mother doesn't love me and want to see me happy. It's just that she's—she's so sick. . . . Father seems so very happy that you and I are such good friends. And Steve—Steve loves it!"

"And I, little Nancy, I love it most of all!"

"Now there's this side of the veil to fix. . . . How my heart beats! . . . Mother Lamar, I suppose I ought to confess to you—but my own mother doesn't know you're here to-night helping me. She said I wasn't to let you—that it would be too much trouble and all that for you. But I knew better, though I said nothing about it. Mother is in a very nervous state the last few days. . . . I wish she'd not try coming to the church. We've all tried to make her promise to wait for us here at home. But it *had* to be a church wedding, and she *has* to be there. . . . Ought those flowers to be a bit more to this side?"

"Your dress is the most beautiful shade of blue. I had one once almost that exact color, but father somehow didn't like me to wear it. Once he said it was the color of Atlantic City—funny. As if a city could have a color. . . . Isn't it almost time to go? It's been such fun having you to help. Mother said I ought to have one of the girls. . . . It *had* to be you. . . . Oh, I wish, I wish, you lived near enough so that I could see you often!"

The wedding march was over. There stood Nancy and her Steve. . . . How like his father he looked—her Billy! Her Billy of that old carefree world where problems never entered. If Billy were only . . . No, no, Billy would have to have gray hair. Billy would have to have lines in his face, if he were here. Billy with gray hair!—Billy, forever young. . . . No, just she, Jenny, could grow old. She and—and Peter.

If she could but have had Peter next to her while his Nancy was marrying her Steve. Instead he was caring for the thin, pale woman at his side, out for the first time in more than ten years. It couldn't be that the thin, pale woman would come like a great dark cloud between Jenny and Steve's Nancy—Steve's and Peter's Nancy. She must be allowed to love Steve's Nancy—Steve's and Peter's Nancy. And Nancy must be allowed to love her, Steve's mother.

“. . . For better or for worse, in sickness and in health . . .”

“. . . I do.”

“Come, mother—she's Mrs. Steve, bless her heart!” It was Alec. . . . The comfort of Alec in the tumult of unhappy thoughts which crowded in on her. . . . “Steve doesn't look as if he'd be giving her up very soon!”

4

Nancy had said to her: “Mother Lamar, I wish it could be you who sees about the presents being put away and all

the last things. Of course mother can't. And Miss Humphreys—I've never confessed to you or anybody, but I *hate* Miss Humphreys and I won't have her touching my things! I'd feel so at ease if I knew you were to be here in the morning."

"I promise you I shall be here in the morning!"

So there she stood, ringing the doorbell of the old Hutchins house again, after all these years. Of course she had been there for that call—oh, that call!—on Mrs. Cairns, and last night, to help dress Nancy for the wedding, and later, for the wedding supper. . . . It had been all Jenny could do to make herself attend that wedding supper, she so dreaded those dark eyes watching her every move. But when she got there she found that Mrs. Cairns had been forced to retire at once—the trip to the church had been too much for her.

"So, father, you'll just have to watch out for my mother Lamar!" Neither of them could say a word all evening. . . .

Last night, all of that excitement. And here she stood, waiting to be allowed to bring order out of chaos, the inevitable chaos following a wedding. Eleven years ago she had rung that doorbell one Sunday night and Philip Cairns had come back into her life.

At last a white-faced maid answered the bell.

"Good morning! I've come to help clean up."

The door was closed slowly after her.

"Mrs. Lamar, she—she died!"

"What did you say?"

"Mrs. Cairns—died. Early this morning, madame. . . . Mr. Cairns is in the living room—maybe you'd like to say a word to him."

The maid opened those heavy doors, and Jenny entered. Again, as eleven years ago, a man standing by a table turned at the sound of some one entering. Again, as eleven years ago, Jenny put out her hand to steady herself against a chair. . . . Some minutes later the maid opened the doors to deliver a message to Mr. Cairns. Funny now—she never saw the like of that. All this time the two of them standing just the way they were when she closed the doors before. Funny now. . . . Well, maybe she might better wait and deliver the message later. . . .

Since her visit with Mrs. Cairns, Jenny had felt that a grayness had settled over her world to last forever. Could it ever be lifted? . . .

". . . Jenny."

". . . Peter."

One by one the bars of his cage crumbled away; her door swung back. Together they stood in the sunlit garden. The warm good sun. They had known something of that garden together through the years. Always it had its wall. Always there was the door that closed on her afterwards, the gate which shut him away. . . . At last there was a garden without boundaries, at last, for them, their garden was the whole wide world. Theirs together the unending sunshine, the flowers; in their hearts forever the song.

The old, old gods looked down from heaven and saw their pet, their Jenny. Never had they deserted her. Long ago they would have seen her joyous in her garden. But nowadays the world gets so very out of hand. The gods, like the rest of us, find there is just so much, and no more, that can be done about it.

THE END.

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